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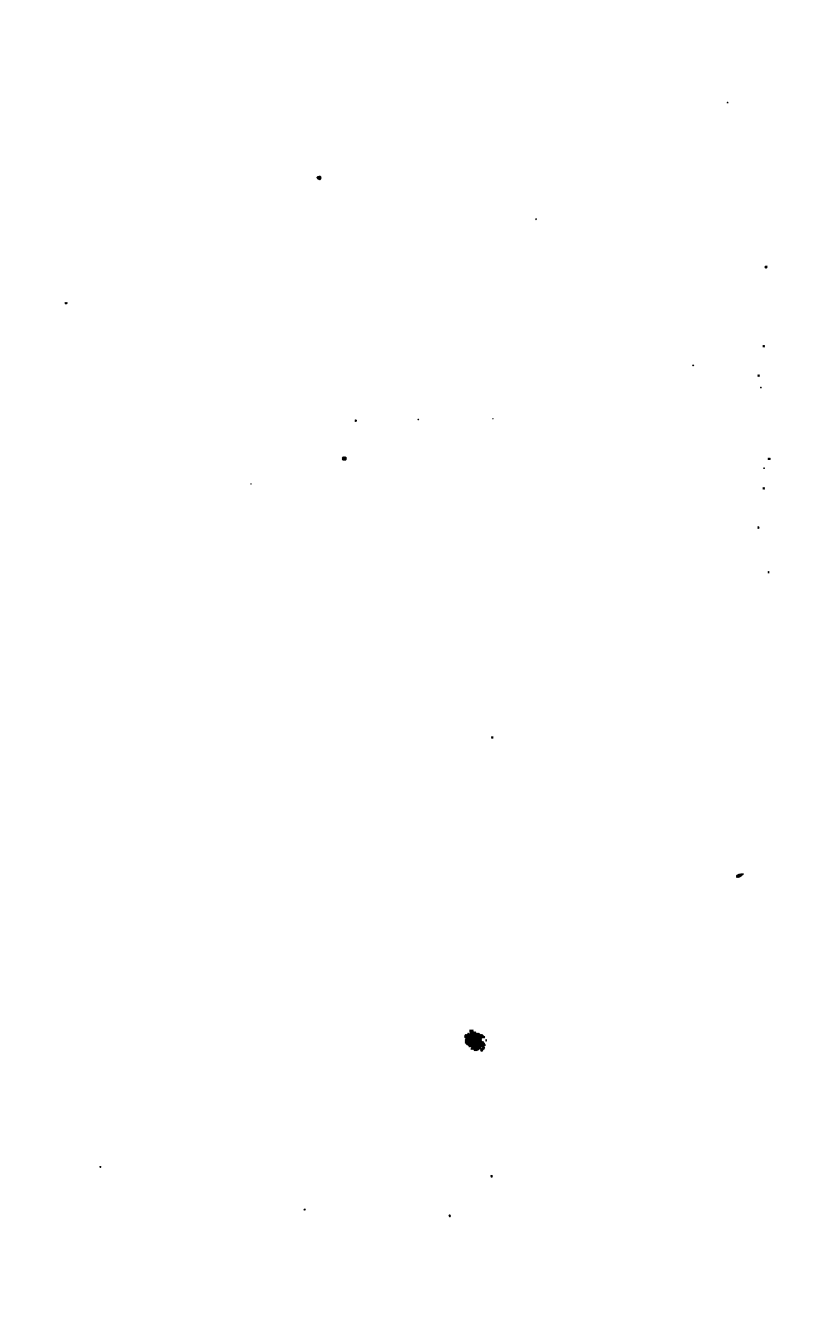
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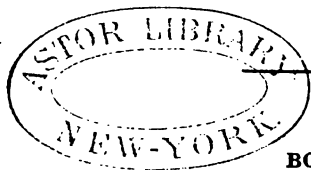






A
COLLECTION
OF
ESSAYS AND TRACTS
IN
THEOLOGY,
FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL NOTICES.

BY JARED SPARKS.



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SELECTION

FROM

ROBERT ROBINSON'S
WORKS.

ROBERT ROBINSON.

AMONG the uses of biography, none is more valuable, than that which inspires good purposes, awakens energy, and incites to exertion. The events of a person's life, who has risen to eminence by the force of his own genius and enterprise, are always interesting, because they are rare ; they are always instructive, because they serve as a light and a guide to others, whose early fortunes may be equally unpropitious.

That one should go out triumphantly on the tide of life, who is blessed with all the advantages of family, wealth, powerful friends, facilities of education, and incitements to employ them, is no cause of wonder. It would, indeed, be strange if it were otherwise. But when the sons of obscurity and indigence break from the cloud which surrounds, and the weight which oppresses them ; when they enter on the world's wide ocean, without a parent's voice to counsel, or a parent's hand to protect ; when each returning day brings them into a new conflict with want and anxiety ; when the allurements of vice besiege them on the one side, and the spectres of desponden-

cy assault them on the other, without shaking their firmness, or turning them from the steady purpose of uprightness and perseverance ; and when, in defiance of every other obstacle, they ascend to a proud station among the wise, the learned, and the good ; it is then that they may justly claim the respect and admiration of their fellow-men, and call on them to behold an example worthy to be praised and emulated. Among the few, who are to be revered for self-acquired eminence, the subject of the present memoir stands in an honourable place.

ROBERT ROBINSON was born at Swaffham, county of Norfolk, on the eighth of October, 1735. His father was a native of Scotland, and an exciseman, of whom little needs be said, except that his humble sphere in life received no dignity from his understanding, and no brightness from his virtues. Mary Wilkin, the mother of Robert Robinson, was descended from a respectable family, and to the advantages of a good education she added the charms of a beautiful person, an amiable temper, and gentleness of manners. She was the daughter of a second marriage, and, as unnatural as it may seem, the affections of her father were centred in the children of his wife by a former husband. Mary was doomed to experience from him less of the tenderness of a parent, than of the austerity and unfeelingness of a severe master. He delighted to thwart her purposes ; and on several occasions, through mere caprice, he rejected the

overtures of worthy and respectable persons, who solicited his daughter's hand.

Disheartened by the severity of her father's treatment, and impatient to escape from it, she imprudently resolved on marrying without his consent. This step was a prelude to untried evils. She united herself to a man in all respects unworthy of her, possessing neither the qualifications for making her happy, nor the disposition to soften and conciliate her father.

They had three children, of whom Robert was the youngest. The elder son was apprenticed to a painter, and the daughter to a mantuamaker. Robert was put to school when six years old, and soon drew the attention of his teacher, as exhibiting more than usual promise. In the mean time, his father removed from Swaffham, and settled at Scaring. He soon after died, and left the destitute mother to provide for herself, and three children. At Scaring was a grammar school, where Lord Thurlow, and some other distinguished persons, received the rudiments of their education. Desirous of encouraging her son's predilection for learning, Mrs Robinson made an effort to maintain him at this school, but her resources proved inadequate to the expense. So favourable an impression had he made, however, on his teacher, the Rev. Joseph Brett, and so much did this gentleman respect the motives and virtues of the mother,

that he kindly offered to instruct his pupil without compensation.

On these terms he continued at school till he was fourteen years old, studied the French and Latin, and made rapid proficiency in most of the branches commonly pursued at such institutions. The time had now come when it was necessary to decide on his future destination. So many discouragements were in the way of his being a scholar, and so many difficulties to be encountered, that his mother resigned this hope, which she had suffered to rise and brighten for a time, and was only concerned to place him beyond the reach of want by providing for him an honest calling. His benevolent instructor, Mr Brett, made interest to procure a situation suited to his capacity and inclination, but without success. He was finally bound as an apprentice to a hairdresser in London.

To this new employment he at first devoted himself with commendable industry, received the approbation of his master, and was able to boast of a due proficiency in the mysteries of his trade. But his thoughts were not to be chained, nor could nature be forced. His mind was too active to rest in vacuity, and his love of books too strong to be conquered by the routine of a barber's shop. It was his custom to rise at four in the morning, and from that hour till called to his master's service, he was busy in reading such books as he could collect from the cheap stalls or borrow from his friends.

His thoughts early took a religious bias, and after going to London a constant attendance on public worship was among his greatest pleasures. Gill, Guise, Romaine, and Whitfield were his favourite preachers. His diary at this time indicates no small degree of religious enthusiasm, and proves him to have gradually attached himself to the methodists. Whitfield, in short, was his adviser and friend, to whom he applied in all cases of spiritual difficulty, and with whom he familiarly corresponded. On one occasion Whitfield read to his congregation at the Tabernacle two of Robinson's letters, while the writer was present. Encouraged by the favourable opinion of so distinguished a man, and moved by the advice of his friends, it is not a matter of surprise that he should begin to think himself destined to walk in a broader sphere, than the one on which he was entered.

So great, indeed, was the esteem and respect which he gained by his genius and good character, that his master was not reluctant to comply with the general voice, and give up his indentures. At the age of nineteen he commenced preaching among the methodists. His youth, his amiable manners, his vivacity and native eloquence drew around him many hearers, and gave a charm to his preaching, which could not fail to please. His voice was clear and melodious, his elocution easy and distinct, his language flowing, and all his external accomplishments

engaging. These advantages, heightened by a liberal degree of youthful enthusiasm, crowned his first efforts with success, and animated his future exertions. He spared no pains to cultivate the powers which nature had bestowed on him, and frequently declaimed by the hour in private, that he might acquire the habit of a ready delivery, and a free use of language. In this practice the foundation was laid of his subsequent eminence as a public speaker. He thought no time mispent, which prepared him for winning the ear and gaining the hearts of his audience, and thus more effectually discharging the duties of his sacred office.

Among the methodists Mr Robinson preached chiefly in Norwich, and different parts of Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. While thus employed he resisted a temptation, which deserves to be recorded as a proof of his early integrity and strength of principle. He had been educated in the established church, and had not joined himself to the dissenters without examining the causes and nature of their dissent. When his talents and virtues had gained him a name in the world, some of his relations, who seem to have forgotten him before, made an attempt to bring him back to the episcopal church. The following incident is mentioned by Dr Rees, the learned editor of the Cyclopædia, in his sermon preached on the occasion of Mr Robinson's death. "A rich relation, who had promised to provide liberally for him, and who

had bequeathed him a considerable sum in his will, threatened to deprive him of every advantage which he had been encouraged to expect, unless he quitted his connexion with the dissenters ; but the rights of conscience, and the approbation of God were superior, in his regard, to every worldly consideration ; he preserved his integrity, steadily maintained his principles, and persevered in his connexion with the dissenters, but forfeited the favour of his relation, and every advantage, which, living or dying, he had in his power to bestow.”* This conduct was consistent with his character through life. A high-minded independence, conscientious regard for truth and liberty, and unyielding adherence to his religious impressions, were among the shining virtues, which never forsook him.

The causes leading to his separation from the methodists are not distinctly known, but he had not preached with them more than two years, when, at the head of a few persons associated for the purpose, he formed an independent society in Norwich. At this time he was a Calvinist, and constructed the confession of faith for his new society on Calvinistic principles. He adopted the rules and discipline common to other independent churches, and administered the ordinances after the same manner.

* Dr Rees' Sermon on the Death of Mr Robert Robinson, p. 59.

In the year 1759, not long after this society was organized, Mr Robinson was invited to take charge of a Baptist congregation at Cambridge. He was already convinced, that adults only were the proper subjects of baptism, and he had himself been baptized by immersion. The Cambridge society was small, and the pecuniary circumstances of its members such, as to afford him no more than a very scanty support. When he commenced preaching in Cambridge he was twenty-three years of age, and two years afterwards he was ordained according to the usual mode of the dissenters. He had been married a little before to a young lady of Norwich.

Mr Robinson's own account of his settlement, written at a later period of his life, will show his prospects to have been not the most flattering. In reference to this subject he observes ; " The settlement of Robinson seems rather a romantic, than rational undertaking, for this pastor was to be maintained. He had not received above ten guineas from his own family for some years ; he had no future prospect of receiving any ; his grandfather had cut him off with a legacy of half a guinea. He had received only a hundred pounds with his wife, and this he had diminished among the methodists. He had never inquired what his congregation would allow him, nor had any body proposed any thing. They had paid him for the first half-year, three pounds twelve shillings and five pence ; they had increased

since, but not enough to maintain him frugally ; there was no prospect of so poor a people supplying him long, especially should his family increase, which it was likely to do. Besides, the congregation, through the libertinism of many of its former members, had acquired a bad character. These would have been insurmountable difficulties to an older and wiser man ; but he was a boy, and the love of his flock was a million to him. His settlement, therefore, on this article, should be no precedent for future settlements."

The situation here described could have few charms for a man who had set his heart on the things of this world, or whose fancy was quickened by the kindling visions of power and fame. But Robinson was not such a man. He loved his profession, and every motive of self-aggrandizement was absorbed in the deeper and purer desire of witnessing the growth of piety, good order, and happiness among his people. His congregation grew larger, and the time came when his annual income was increased to more than ninety pounds. At first he lived at Fulbourn, five miles from the place of his sabbath duties, where he contracted an acquaintance with Mr Graves, a gentleman of property and benevolence, from whom he received many substantial tokens of friendship.

He next removed to Hauxton, about the same distance from Cambridge, where he resided for several years, the tenant of an humble cottage, devoted

assiduously to his professional labours, and providing for the support of a numerous family, and an aged mother. His disinterested ardour, his kindness to the poor, his love of doing good, and his unwearied activity in making himself useful, attracted to him the notice of all the respectable part of the community, and quickened the generosity of some worthy and opulent persons. On the sabbath he often preached three times, and during the week several times in the neighbouring villages. He was intimate with all the surrounding clergy among the dissenters, and had for his early companions Roland Hill and Charles de Coetlogon. His congregation increased so much, that a more commodious place of worship was found necessary, and the pastor was highly gratified with the promptness and unanimity with which it was erected.

In the midst of his professional labours he was a diligent student in theology and literature. Free access to the libraries of the University of Cambridge, and conversation with the learned men residing there, enabled him to pursue his studies with advantage. He was an admirer of Saurin, and in 1770 translated and published two of his sermons. These were sent out as specimens, which, if approved, he promised should be the forerunners of others. The success of his project was quite equal to his expectation, and he afterwards translated at different times five volumes of sermons selected from Saurin. These have gone through several editions, and to-

gether with a sixth volume by Hunter, and a seventh by Sutcliffe, they constitute the works of Saurin, as they now appear in the English dress.

While residing in the cottage at Hauxton he also published his *Arcana, or the Principles of the late Petitioners to Parliament for Relief in Matter of Subscription, in eight Letters to a Friend*. These letters were adapted to the times, and attracted a lively attention. The dissenters were making all possible exertions to have the law repealed, which required from them subscription to the articles. Presbyterians and Baptists, orthodox and heterodox, united their forces to abolish a law, which operated with equal severity on them all, and which was in itself so flagrant an encroachment on justice, liberty, the rights of conscience, and the claims of humanity. All rallied under the same banner, and cried out with one voice against the oppression which weighed them down, till, after many unsuccessful struggles, their voice was heard, their petitions heeded, and dissenting ministers and schoolmasters were allowed the privilege of prosecuting their peaceful avocations without violating their conscience by subscribing the Thirty-nine Articles, or subjecting themselves to a civil penalty by resisting so unholy a requisition. During the struggle for christian freedom the above letters were written. Clothed in a language always sprightly, sometimes adorned with glowing imagery, sometimes rising with the majesty of argument, and at others

pungent with satire, they were well calculated for popular effect. They enter largely into the chief points of the controversy, and bating some defects of style, and perhaps occasional faults of sentiment, it will be rare to find a more ingenious vindication of the rights and privileges of christian liberty.

Robinson left Hauxton in 1773, and settled at Chesterton within two miles of Cambridge. This brought him nearer to the centre of his parochial charge, and the facilities for his literary pursuits were multiplied by his proximity to the university. But his income was not yet adequate to support a family of nine children, and he was compelled to look around him for other sources of emolument. He turned his attention to agriculture. By rigid economy, personal inspection of his affairs, judicious investments, and a spirit of enterprise that never slumbered, he found himself in a few years a thriving farmer, and had the joy to feel, that by the blessing of Providence his numerous family was beyond the grasp of want, and the caprice of fortune. Mr Dyer thus speaks of his character as a farmer and economist. "It would be no less agreeable than instructive to survey his rural economy, and domestic arrangements in his new situation; the versatility of his genius was uncommon; and whether he was making a bargain, repairing a house, stocking a farm, giving directions to workmen, or assisting their labours, he was the same invariable man, displaying no less

vigour in the execution of his plans, than ingenuity in their contrivance. The readiness with which he passed from literary pursuits to rural occupations, from rural occupations to domestic engagements, from domestic engagements to the forming of plans for dissenting ministers, to the settling of churches, to the solving of cases of conscience, to the removing of the difficulties of ignorant, or softening the asperities of quarrelsome brethren, was surprising.”* This is the language of one who lived near him, for many years, and saw him often.

His professional duties were numerous. Those pertaining to his own parish made but a part. He was invited to attend ordinations in all the counties around him ; his judgment was respected and his advice sought in cases of differences between churches ; he was the counsellor of his parishioners in their temporal as well as spiritual concerns ; the watchful guardian of the unprotected and distressed ; the patron and benevolent friend of the poor. These calls of duty did not relax his literary ardour. He went on with his translations of Saurin, printed now and then an occasional sermon of his own, and, at the request of two or three eminent gentlemen, wrote a

* Dyer's Life of Robinson, p. 98. This work was published in 1796, by a person well acquainted with Robinson ; but it is a work singularly defective in arrangement, wanting in interest, and barren of incidents, considering the opportunities and materials with which the author was favoured.

treatise on affinities in marriage, which was highly commended by jurists, as marked by an acute discrimination and force of argument.

About the year 1776, Robinson published his *Plea for the Divinity of Christ*. This topic was now much agitated by reason of the late resignation of Lindsey and Jebb for scruples of conscience concerning the trinity. Robinson's *Plea* is drawn up with ingenuity, in a popular style, and winning manner. The arguments are less sound than specious; they take names for things, and rest on deductions which go not beneath the surface of the Scriptures; in the balance with just criticism they lose their weight and their substance. In the eyes of a certain class of trinitarians they were masterly, because with more than common skill they defended an old ground, which it was thought difficult to maintain much longer, and which, in truth, has since been nearly abandoned. But even this popular treatise did not please all parties. None withheld from the author the merit of ingenuity; some professed to admire the force and accuracy of his reasoning; while others were troubled with a kind of indefinable suspicion, that he had stopped short of the desired object. These latter seem to have been alarmed, that the author was so sparing of the fire and rage of controversy. Robinson observes in writing to a friend, "The temper of the *Plea* has procured me a deal of blame from the good folks, who inhabit the torrid zone." These

zealous partisans were not satisfied, that he should win the day, unless he carried war with flames and sword into the conquered enemy's camp.

Others, however, were of a different mind, and the author received a profusion of complementary letters from dignitaries in the established church. It was whispered, and more than once proclaimed aloud, as a thing to be lamented, that such a man should be a dissenter, and waste his days in strolling with a bewildered flock beyond the enclosures of the true faith. Gilded offers were made to him, if he would have the conscience to slide out of his errors, go up from the unseemly vale of poverty, and take his rest on the commanding eminence of church preferment. To these overtures he was deaf; from his principles he could not be moved. When Dr Ogden said to him, in trying to unsettle his purpose, "Do the dissenters know the worth of the man?" he replied, "The man knows the worth of the dissenters." This reply he verified by his warm devotedness to their interests through life. He received many letters approving his work from persons not belonging to the episcopal church, especially his Baptist associates in the ministry.

The Plea was answered by Lindsey, but Robinson never replied; nor did he write any more in defence of the divinity of Christ. Whether influenced by Lindsey's arguments, or whether his own examination of the subject had supplied him weaker grounds

than he expected, or whether his mind received a bias from any other quarter, it is certain that his sentiments about that time underwent a change. During the latter years of his life he rejected the trinity, and believed in the subordinate nature of Christ.

The year after the Plea, Robinson published a curious tract, entitled the *History and Mystery of Good Friday*. In this pamphlet he traces back the church holidays to their origin, and proves them for the most part to have arisen out of heathen, or Jewish practices, and to derive no authority from the christian religion. It contains a severe, and somewhat rough philippic against the church of England, which boasts of being reformed, and having cast off the abuses of the Romish church, while yet many are cherished, as unwarrantable and pernicious as those severed from the old stock. This tract was exceedingly popular, and ran speedily through several editions.

But the work, which produced greater excitement than any of our author's writings, was a *Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Nonconformity*, published in 1778. Within a moderate compass, it embraces all the points of controversy between the established church and the dissenters. Its manner is original and striking. The time of its appearance was favourable to its currency and interest, for the dissenters' bill was then pending in parliament. In the House of Lords this Plan of Lectures was honourably

mentioned by Lord Shelburne, and in the House of Commons, Burke read passages from it, which he attempted to turn to the disadvantage of the petitioners. Fox repelled his attack, and foiled his attempt. Many articles were written against it, and, among others, strictures by Mr Burgess, prebendary of Winchester. Robinson replied to none, except the latter, on which he bestowed a few remarks in his preface to the fifth edition.

The next literary enterprise of Robinson was his translation of *Claude's Essay on the Composition of a Sermon*. To this essay the translator added a life of the author, remarks on the history of preaching, and a vast body of notes, making together two thick volumes. The notes are written in the author's peculiar manner, full of spirit and vivacity, and discover a prodigious extent of reading. Some of them are valuable, many are highly entertaining, but they seem to have been hastily thrown together, and collected with too little discrimination. They occasionally descend to trifling incidents, anecdotes, and inapposite reflections, equally offensive to good taste, and barren of instruction. But with all these defects, Robinson's original edition is vastly preferable to those coming after, in which the editors took the liberty to abridge the notes, and add others of their own. In the Rev. Charles Simeon's edition, the notes are chiefly omitted, and their place supplied by skeletons of his own sermons.

Mr Robinson's celebrated volume of *Village Sermons* was published in 1786. We have already observed, that it was his custom to preach in the neighbouring villages, and frequently he tarried at a place over night, and held religious service early in the morning, before the labourers were gone to their work. In summer these exercises were conducted in the open air, and fully attended. The above volume is composed of discourses delivered on these occasions, and written out afterwards as dictated by the author to an amanuensis. They had evidently been prepared with care in his own mind, and they contain a copiousness of language, a felicity of illustration, and a readiness in quoting and applying appropriate passages of scripture, rarely to be witnessed. They were framed for a particular purpose, that of enlightening and improving the less informed classes of society ; and whoever reads them will not wonder, that this purpose was attained, and that even those for whom the things of the world had attractions should resign for an hour the labour of gain, and listen with delight, to the persuasive accents of the preacher. They may be read with profit by all, who love to contemplate the workings of a powerful mind in recommending and enforcing the principles of a holy religion, who are captivated with the inventions of genius, the current of a natural eloquence, sound words uttered in the spirit of christian philanthropy, and sentiments breathing the influence of a rational, fervent piety.

The last works in which our author was engaged were the *History of Baptism*, and his *Ecclesiastical Researches*. These were also his largest works, each making a closely printed quarto volume. It had long been a source of regret among the Baptists, that no full and authentic history of their brethren existed, and that their opinions, character, and progress had never been represented to the world in the light they deserved. It was at length resolved by some of the leading members of this denomination to supply the deficiency, and appoint a suitable person to write a copious and accurate history. The general voice fixed on Robinson, and in 1781 he was invited by an authorized committee to undertake the task. He complied with the request, and immediately set himself about the gigantic labour of wading through the ecclesiastical records of ancient and modern times, appalled neither by the lumber of antiquity, nor the mountains of volumes, which have been raised by the prolific industry of later ages.

That he might have a more ready access to scarce books, it was a part of his plan to reside a few days in every month in London. This design, however, was soon given up as impracticable, for so much was he sought after as a preacher, that he found his attention perpetually diverted from his studies. Appointments were made by his friends for preaching every day in the week, and so slowly did his history advance in the midst of these interruptions that he

was glad to escape from them to his farm, his family, and his people, in the country. Here he was kindly favoured with books from the university, and occasionally from London, and here he completed the History of Baptism.

This volume was chiefly printed before the author's death, but not published till after that event. It contains a vast fund of historical knowledge on the subject which he professes to treat, and indicates an uncommonly deep and patient examination. The Ecclesiastical Researches was a posthumous work, and having been left in an unfinished state, is in many respects imperfect. It contains some curious facts relating to the history of the existence and progress of the principles of religious liberty and a rational faith during the early periods of christianity, and throughout the dark ages. It proves, that these principles were never extinct in the gloomiest times, but that they were cherished in the hearts of a few sincere, secluded worshippers, who were either too remote from the public eye to be observed, or too insignificant to draw down upon themselves the wrath of bigotry, or the rod of persecution. In this respect the Ecclesiastical Researches supplies a valuable link in the history of the church. But on the whole, neither this nor the History of Baptism, is equal to the author's other performances. While preparing them it is evident his mind had lost much of its former vigour, and was approaching that state

of inefficiency, which it was the melancholy lot of his friends to contemplate in the latter days of his life. However much the cause of truth may have gained by these works, they have added little to the author's fame.

During the last year of Robinson's life, his health and his intellect gave symptoms of a rapid decline. Of this he appeared to be fully aware, for to a friend, who visited him not long before his death, he said, "You are come to see only the shadow of Robert Robinson." In the spring of 1790 he engaged to preach the charity sermons for the benefit of the dissenting schools at Birmingham. He left home on the second day of June in a languid frame of body and mind, but so well did he bear the fatigue of the journey, that he preached twice on the following sabbath. On Monday evening he was taken ill, and his friends were alarmed ; but he gained strength the next day. He retired to rest late in the evening, after eating his supper with a good appetite, and by the ease and cheerfulness of his conversation relieving those around him from all apprehensions of immediate danger. But how frail are the foundations of human confidence, how deceitful the visions of human hope ! When the morning came he was found lifeless in his bed. His features were tranquil, and his spirit seemed to have deserted without a struggle its mortal tenement. His body was interred at Birmingham, and on the sabbath following a discourse adapted to the occasion was preached by Dr Priestley.

In the year 1807, Mr Flower published the *Miscellaneous Works of Robert Robinson*, in four volumes, to which he prefixed a brief memoir of the author's life and writings. This edition comprises all his works, except the History of Baptism, Ecclesiastical Researches, Village Sermons, and Notes to Claude. Among his best writings are the prefaces to the several volumes of Saurin, especially the one on Christian Liberty. The Life of Claude is well written, but a dissertation on public preaching, prefixed to the second volume of Claude's Essay, although it contains some novel thoughts, and valuable facts, is imperfect, and obviously put together from ill digested materials. This remark, indeed, applies to several of his minor pieces, where a broader plan seems to have been laid, than his leisure and opportunities allowed him to fill up.

In selecting articles for the present publication, a range has been taken through the whole of the author's works, nor has any scruple been felt in omitting occasionally such paragraphs, as have no more than a remote bearing on the main object of the piece chosen. The author's desultory mode of writing, and the local topics sometimes introduced, have rendered this latitude necessary.

Among the numerous excellencies of Robinson's style, there are some glaring faults. His imagination is brilliant and active, but it rambles without license, and luxuriates without moderation. He never wants

an apposite figure to illustrate any position, but his choice is frequently ill-judged, and rests on low images unworthy of his subject. This may be accounted for, perhaps, from the circumstances of his education, and from his invariable habit of bringing down his language to the plain country people to whom he preached. Another fault is want of method, and looseness of reasoning. This fault is not perpetual, but it occurs too often. Logic was not his strongest point ; he loved not that his fancy should be clogged and hampered by the trammels of the schools ; he chose a path of his own, and in his passion for freedom was impatient of the restraints which others have thought so wholesome a branch of discipline, and so useful in checking the exuberance of a prurient imagination, and maturing the decisions of a wayward judgment. It needs hardly be added, that his taste partook of these defects ; it is sometimes bad, and often not to be commended.

But these are small imperfections compared with the predominant features of Robinson's mind. The comprehensive views which he took of every subject, the richness and abundance of his thoughts, the power of intellect which weighs in his sentences, the point of his expressions, the varied and playful although erratic excursions of his imagination ; and, above all, his sincerity and ardour, the justness of his sentiments, his undisguised manner, his benevolence, charity, and christian temper, his independence and

love of freedom, his unconquerable hostility to all religious domination under whatever name or character, his aversion to bigotry and narrowness, his adherence to the simple truths of the Gospel ; these give a charm and a value to his writings, by which none can fail to be instructed and improved. Whoever would look for pleasure or benefit from the productions of a writer with traits like these, will find his labour well rewarded in perusing the works of Robert Robinson.

ON

UNIFORMITY IN RELIGION.

FROM THE ARCANA.

LEGISLATION is doubtless a sacred thing ; it is a divine imitation of the government of mankind, and is deservedly assigned to the first in birth, property, and skill ; but, the history of all nations will prove, that in parliaments, as in paradise, the serpent has found a way to corrupt and deprave. Ignorance or interest, negligence or pride, have too often prevailed over the generous principles which ought to influence these gods of mankind ; and one age has been driven to repeal the laws of a former ; so that perhaps legislation would furnish a large history of the extravagancies of the human mind, among which an Act of Uniformity would appear one of the greatest. Britons boast of their laws, and in general with great reason ; but some of them blush for their country when they read a law entitled an Act of Uniformity.

It would be foreign from the present purpose to inquire the origin of this law ; it may be more proper

to show that religious uniformity is an impossibility, and that a law of this kind can neither be argued from the light of nature, nor from the holy Scriptures. The idea of uniformity is neither the idea of a philosopher, nor of a christian. The fabricature of this law therefore by men who had a just right to both these titles, implies a moment's absence.

Sound policy requires a legislature to preserve its dignity ; but the dignity of a legislature is never more prostituted than when impracticable edicts are issued. The dignity of legislation depends more on enforcing, than on inventing a law ; the latter may be done by a pedant in his study, but the first must have power, property, magistracy, penalty, in a word, authority to support it ; and this energy is its dignity. Where a tax is levied which the people cannot pay ; where a kind of obedience is required which the people cannot yield ; the legislators are forced to dispense with the obedience required. And what follows ? the people despise a folly which could not foresee, a narrowness of capacity which could not comprehend, a timidity which dares not, or a weakness which cannot enforce its decrees. Did not all Europe deride the absurdity of those magistrates, who, in the reign of Mary, cited to their commissioners, Fagius and Bucer, who were both dead and buried, to appear and give an account of their faith ? and, as if that was not quite ridiculous enough, caused their bones to be dug up out of their graves and burnt for non-appearance !

Aut nunquam tentes, aut perfice, is an excellent motto, and nowhere more rationally applied than in the matter of law-making. Had this been attended to, (but who that attends to the transactions of the year 1559, can wonder that it was not?) an *act of uniformity* could never have been passed. The impossibility of enforcing it might have been foreseen; nor ought it to be wondered at if five years after, "her Majesty was informed, that some received the communion kneeling, others standing, others sitting. Some baptized in a font, some in a bason; some signed with the sign of the cross, others not." In vain the queen attempted to enforce the act by penalties; in vain have succeeding princes endeavoured to enforce it; in vain were the formidable forces of oaths, subscriptions, fines, and prisons brought into the field; cruelty and lenity, madness and moderation, the gentleness of the eighteenth, and the rage of the seventeenth century have been employed in vain; the act stands disobeyed and unrepealed to this day.

Make religion what you will; let it be speculation, let it be practice; make it faith, make it fancy; let it be reason, let it be passion; let it be what you will; *uniformity* in it is not to be expected. Philosophy is a stranger to it, and christianity disowns it.

A philosopher holds that the system of the universe is perfect; that the duty and glory of man is to follow, not force nature; that moral philosophy is nothing but a harmony of the world of spirit with the

world of matter ; that all the fine descriptions of virtue are nothing but essays on this conformity ; thus he proves that moral evil is the production of natural evil, moral good the production of natural good. A philosopher would say to a legislator, as the poet to a man of taste :

To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
To rear the column, or the arch to bend,
To swell the terrace, or to sink the grot,
In all, let NATURE never be forgot.

Give a philosopher a farm, and enjoin him to cultivate it *en philosophe*, he will study the soil, the situation, the seasons, and so on ; and, having comprehended what his farm is capable of, he will improve it accordingly. In the same manner he directs his garden, and every plant in it, never expecting to *gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles*. What would he, yea, what would the unphilosophized farmers say of an *act for the uniformity of husbandry* ? An act of *uniformity*, say the honest rustics, what's that ? What's that ! Why, you must grow nothing but wheat. How ! say they, some of our lands are too light, they will produce none ; we can grow rye there indeed ; we have some even not worth ploughing for rye ; however they will serve for a sheep-walk, or at worst for a rabbit-warren. Thus NATURE teaches men to reason and thus they reason right.

Go a step farther. Make this philosopher a tutor, and commit to his tuition a company of youths ; he

will no more think of *uniforming* these young gentlemen, than of teaching his horse to fly, or his parrot to swim. Their geniuses differ, says he, and I must diversify their educations; NATURE has formed this for elocution, and that for action. And, should the blind fondness of parents complain, his answer is ready, *what was I, that I could withstand God?* In short, place such a man in what disinterested sphere you will, and his principles guide his practice; except indeed he should be chosen to represent a county; then probably, not having the fear of philosophy before his eyes, he might vote for an *act of uniformity*.

A law that requires uniformity, either requires men to be of *the same sentiments*, or to practise *the same ceremonies*. Now if it should appear that the first is impossible, the last will fall of itself. For then the question will be, ought two men, who confessedly differ in sentiment, to profess that they agree? Ought an honest man to *be* one thing, and *appear* another? Heaven forbid that any should maintain so dangerous a thesis!

You are a man of extensive knowledge; you know the ancient and modern creeds; you remember that Harry the Eighth enjoined "*all preachers to instruct the people to believe the WHOLE bible, THE THREE CREEDS, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, and to interpret all things according to them.*" You know that in Edward the Sixth's reign, TWO-AND-FORTY ARTICLES, drawn up by Cranmer and Ridley,

were thought necessary to be published, *for the avoiding diversity of opinions, and establishing consent touching true religion.* In the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, you know, ELEVEN articles were "*set out by order of both archbishops, metropolitans, and the rest of the bishops, for the UNITY of doctrine to be taught and holden of ALL persons, vicars and curates; as well in testification of their COMMON CONSENT in the said doctrine, to the stopping of the mouths of them that go about to slander the ministers of the church for DIVERSITY of judgment, &c.*" Two years after, all the former were reviewed, and THE WHOLE BIBLE, the THREE creeds, the TWO-AND-FORTY articles, and the ELEVEN articles, were collected into one aggregate sum, and made THIRTY-NINE. Subscription to these has been essential ever since, which subscription *is an argument* (as his Majesty's declaration says) *that ALL clergymen AGREE in the TRUE, usual, literal meaning of the said articles.*

Whatever be the *true* meaning of these articles, it is not only certain that clergymen explain, and consequently believe them in different and even contrary senses; but it is also credible that no thirty-nine articles can be invented by the wit of man, which thirty-nine men can exactly agree in. It is not obstinacy, it is necessity.

Suppose the thirty-nine articles to contain a given number of ideas, and, for argument's sake, suppose that number to be fifty; suppose the capacities

of men to differ, as they undoubtedly do, and one man's intelligence to be able to comprehend fifty, a second's five hundred, and a third's but five-and-twenty. The first may subscribe these fifty points of doctrine, but who can confine the genius of the second? Or who can expand the capacity of the last? In minds capable of different operations, no number of points of doctrine can possibly be fixed on as a standard for all; for fix on what number soever you will, there will always be too many for the capacities of some, and for others too few. If this be the case who can establish an uniformity of sentiment? What earthly power can say, "*we will not endure any varying or departing in the least degree?*"

Moreover, it may be asked whether all these points of doctrine be capable of an *equal* degree of evidence; and if not, whether it be possible to enforce an *uniform* degree of belief. Take for example two propositions. "*The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England.*"—"Athanasius's creed—may be proved by most certain warrants of holy scripture.".

The first of these propositions is capable of demonstration, but the last is very doubtful; and if the degree of assent ought to be exactly proportional to the degree of evidence, a magistrate, who would establish uniformity, must either give falsehood the evidence of truth, or oblige men to believe a probable as fully as a certain proposition. But if neither of

these can be done, what becomes of uniformity ? An uniform assent to fifty propositions, some of which are probable, others certain, and others (*pace tantis talibusque viris*) false !

It is the easiest thing in the world to retire, sit down, invent, and publish a system on any subject. Imagination, always prolific, contributes largely ; and it is not difficult to erect an ideal world with Berkeley ; an ideal republic with Plato ; or in short a philosophical romance of any kind. All sorts of men, poets, philosophers, orators, divines, some of each class have erred on this head ; the most ingenious wandering the farthest. But when these romantic machines are applied to real life, to the tillage of a field, the government of a state, the forming of a church, they appear only elaborate trifles ; amusive, but not useful. If such ingenious inventors are great men, there is another class greater still, a class whose motto is *DUCE NATURA SEQUAMUR*.

After all, what is uniformity good for ? Is it essential to salvation ? Is it essential to real piety in this life ? Does it make a subject more loyal to his prince ? A husband more faithful, or a parent more tender ? Cannot a man be honest and just in his dealings without knowing any thing about St Athanasius ? Nay, has not this act produced more sophistry and cruelty than any other act of parliament from the reformation to this day ? Not secular, but spiritual se-

verity ; not the sophistry of the bar, but the sophistry of the church.

Did the great Supreme govern his empire by an act of uniformity, men might be damned for believing too little, seraphs degraded for believing too much. The creed of the inhabitants of Saturn might be established, and theirs that dwelt in the moon only tolerated. In such a case, what a fine field of controversial glory would open to the divines of these two provinces of the kingdom *de origine mali*. Almighty Father, can a blind belief please thee ? Can thy creatures believe what they cannot perceive the evidence of ? Can all understand the evidence of the same number of truths ? Formed with different organs, educated in different prejudices, dost thou require the same services ? Art thou indeed the *hard master who reapest where thou hast not sowed* ? Far from all thy subjects be such a thought !

Conclude then, that if *God be a rock, and his work perfect*, if VARIETY be the characteristic of all his works, an attempt to establish UNIFORMITY is reversing and destroying all the Creator's glory. To attempt an uniformity of colour, sound, taste, smell, would be a fine undertaking ; but what, pray, will you call an attempt to establish an UNIFORMITY OF THOUGHT ?

You will say, christianity is not the religion of nature, but the religion of revelation ; what therefore may seem absurd to philosophy, may be explained

by christianity. Perhaps the Founder of our holy religion may have established uniformity. If he has, uniformity may be a christian though not a philosophical idea. Well, this shall be inquired in the next letter.

ON THE

RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

FROM THE ARCANA.

· You have often admired that Dedication to the Pope which is prefixed to a piece of Sir Richard Steele's, entitled *An Account of the State of the Roman Catholic Religion throughout the World*.—"Your Holiness," says the writer, "is not perhaps aware, how near the churches of us protestants have at length come to those privileges and perfections, which you boast of as peculiar to your own.—The most sagacious persons have not been able to discover any other difference between us, as to the main *principle* of all doctrine, government, worship, and discipline, but this one, that you *cannot* err in any thing you determine, and we never *do*. That is, in other words, that you are *infallible*, and we *always in the right*. We cannot but esteem the advantage to be exceedingly on our side, in this case, because we have *all the benefits of infallibility, without the absurdity of pretending to it*, and without the uneasy

task of maintaining a point so shocking to the understanding of mankind.”* This is not a libel ; this is a satire ; the worst is, this satirical stroke is true. The church of Rome refuses the Scriptures to the people ; some protestant churches grant the sight of the book, but retain the meaning. Can you see any difference ? Search or not search, read or not read, the sense is fixed, it is at the peril of your preferment to vary.

Whence church governors pretend to derive this right does not signify. It can neither be derived from the nature of christianity, the doctrine or practice of Christ or his Apostles, the condition of man in a state of nature, his condition as a member of society subject to magistracy, nor indeed in England from any thing but *the act of supremacy* ; an act which transferred a power over men’s consciences from the pope to the king. His Majesty Henry the VIIIth, by a master stroke in politics, preferred an indictment against the whole body of the clergy in Westminster Hall, and obtained judgment upon the statute of præmunire, whereby they were all declared to be out of the king’s protection, and to have forfeited all their goods and chattels ; and then pardoned them on two conditions ; first, that they should pay into the exchequer £118,840. Secondly, that they

* [The curious Dedication, from which these words are quoted, was written by Hoadly. See the whole article in the present Collection, Vol. i. p. 255. ED.]

should yield his Majesty the title of *sole and supreme head of the church of England*; a title which by subsequent declarations was so explained, as to annihilate the right of private judgment, and yet private judgment gave birth to this very act.

Suppose his Majesty Harry the VIIIth, exercising the authority allowed by the act of supremacy, and among other things forming a creed for his subjects; suppose him a man of shallow capacity; would not his creed have been too lean and poor for many of his subjects? And on the contrary, suppose him a man of an exalted genius, of a prodigious stretch of thought; would not his creed have been too rich and full for many more? But the impossibility of exercising such a power was discussed in the last letter; this is to canvass the legality of it.

No mean can be lawful in itself which destroys the end for which it is appointed. Now the end to be obtained is the establishment of christianity. But how can the depriving men of the right of private judgment be a lawful mean of obtaining that end, seeing christianity is a personal obedience to the laws of Christ arising from a conviction of their excellency, and their connexion with certain facts of whose certainty evidence is given, which evidence to be received must be examined? Christianity proposes truths of speculation and truths of practice; if men can examine and ascertain the first by proxy, why not obey the last in the same manner? But who can *love or fear, believe or hope*, by substitution?

If to deny the right of private judgment be destructive of the nature of christianity in general, it is more remarkably so of the christianity of the reformed churches. The right of private judgment is the very foundation of the Reformation, and without establishing the former in the fullest sense, the latter can be nothing but a faction in the state, a schism in the church. The language of the reformers must be something like this when they proposed subscription. "Gentlemen, the right of private judgment allowed of God, and supported by all kinds of argument, hath been challenged and exercised by men for upwards of five thousand five hundred years; we ourselves have recovered it from the pope, who had unlawfully usurped this right, and *as God, sat in the temple of God*. In virtue of this right, we have examined the holy Scriptures, fixed their meaning, and engaged the king to support a creed, which by delegation we have composed for his Majesty, and for all his subjects. In us the right of private judgment ceases, and should England continue five thousand five hundred years longer, no man shall exercise this right without suffering all the penalties we can inflict. Indeed all Europe is but just emerging from barbarity, learning is but in its infancy, and England is torn and rent with civil dissensions. In all probability, peace may succeed war, learning may diffuse itself, and invigorate to maturity; and a hundred years hence men may arise infinitely more capable than we

are ; but let succeeding ages improve as they will, all men shall *leave the minster where they find it.*" How say you, Sir ? Cranmer stained his archiepiscopal hands with blood ; but could even Cranmer have opened the convocation with such a speech as *this* ? Yet speak it or no, it is all fact.

The reformers were not to blame for exercising the right of private judgment themselves ; their fault was a denial of the same right to others. They had the highest authority for what they did, deriving it from the doctrine and example of Christ and his Apostles.

Take one, two, or more of our Saviour's doctrines, and ask what magic can there be in subscribing them without examination ? Himself never proposed such a thing, but on the contrary, exhorted his hearers to *search the Scriptures* ; a strange impertinence, unless the right of private judgment be allowed ! Nor did he only exhort the people to judge for themselves, but he also warned his disciples not to usurp that right. *CALL no man your father upon the earth, neither BE YE CALLED masters.* Neither impose your opinions upon others, nor suffer them to impose theirs upon you.

Had Jesus Christ considered the right of private judgment in an unlawful light, he would first have instructed Herod, or Caiaphas, or some of the principal rabbies, and by them he would have converted the nation. But instead of that, he condemns the

doctrines of the church governors, addresses his sermons *ad populum*, gives it as a proof of his mission that *the gospel was preached to the poor*, and constantly protects his followers in the exercise of the right of private judgment. When the disciples plucked and ate the ears of corn, they broke two canons of the established church. It was on a sabbath day; and probably before morning service was over; and the church had determined the illegality of what they did. Used to judge for themselves, they thought the church mistaken in this case, ventured to think for themselves, and acted accordingly. Did not Jesus Christ protect them in their claim?

The Apostles, worthy followers of such a master, went into all nations, preaching a doctrine which no church governors upon earth believed. Did they deny the right of private judgment? If they had, their expeditions would have been in the Quixotic style. Did St Paul write to Corinth? *I speak as to wise men; JUDGE YE what I say*. Did he write to Rome? *Let EVERY MAN be fully persuaded in his own mind*. Every body understood this. The populace at Berea, men and women, *searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so*. The students at Athens desired to *know what the new doctrine was*, of which the Apostle spake; for the purpose of search, no doubt. The magistrates, as Gallio, declared themselves NO JUDGES IN SUCH MATTERS. And hence the amazing success of his preaching;

for what himself calls *preaching with demonstration of the spirit, and power*, St Luke calls *reasoning in the synagogue every sabbath day*. Compare Acts xviii. 4. with 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. Who can account for all this without the right of private judgment ?

Consider the condition of man in a state of nature ; and you will readily grant either that a right of determining for himself is no man's, or every man's right. Vindicate the right to one, and you do it to two, to two hundred, to two thousand, to the whole world ; for all in a state of nature are on a level. There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, prince nor subject ; the right of one argued from his nature, is the right of all. Whether men forfeit this right in a state of society is another question.

A christian not only cannot, but if he could he ought not to dispose of this right, because not only he cannot be a christian without its exercise, but all the purposes of civil government may be answered without it. The power of the magistrate is an article of importance enough to demand a particular discussion ; let the remaining space of this letter be filled up with inquiring, whether, if this advantage of private judging had been denied to other classes of men, the world would not have sustained infinite damage ?

Choose of the mechanical arts, or of the sciences, which you please, place it in the state in which it was seven hundred, five hundred, or two hundred

years ago ; let its then present state be defined, its *ne plus ultra* determined ; let all future search be prohibited, and what an innumerable multitude of useful discoveries are men deprived of ?

When Columbus first imparted his designs relative to the discovery of America to Ferdinand, king of Spain, his Majesty thought proper to advise with his ecclesiastical counsellors about it. All were against the project, and quoted St Austin, who, in his book *de civitate Dei*, had declared it impossible to pass out of one hemisphere into another ; and had denied that there could be any Antipodes. Seneca, Seneca the heathen, had declared long before, that future ages would discover new worlds, and that Thule would not be the farthest region upon earth. In this case it must be owned that St Austin was an heretic, and Seneca a sound believer. The king and Columbus ventured to dissent, judged for themselves, and found ample reward for so doing, notwithstanding clerical decisions. Indeed, St Austin was not the only person who denied the possibility of Antipodes ; the church denied it, that is, the head, Pope Zachary, denied it for all the members. And this is the order that he sent to his legate Boniface, Archbishop of Mentz, who had accused Virgil, bishop of Saltzburg, of holding the dangerous error of the Antipodes. “ If,” says the head of the church, “ he should be convicted of maintaining that perverse doctrine, which he hath uttered against the

Lord, and against his own soul, that is, that there is another world, other men under the earth, another sun and another moon, call a consistory, degrade him from the honour of the priesthood, *et ab ecclesiâ pelle.*" A fine story for a man to be excommunicated for !

Has not all Europe pitied the fate of Copernicus and Galileo, the fathers of modern astronomy ? The first kept his work near forty years before he dared to publish it, and died immediately after it was presented to him ; the persecution he dreaded being the supposed cause. As to Galileo, he was charged with heresy, first, for affirming that the sun was in the centre ; secondly, that the earth was not in the centre, but had a diurnal motion. His works were burnt, himself imprisoned, and being released was enjoined a penance of repeating once a week for three years the seven penitential psalms. As if the penitential psalms said any thing about Galileo's crime ! But these are some of the fruits of denying the right of private judgment. The pope, the sole judge, was pleased to think that these discoveries in geography and astronomy clashed with certain doctrines established in the church.

What a condition would all Christendom have been in by this time, had not this extravagant claim been denied, and the right of private judgment established in arts and sciences ? All the received systems of music, astronomy, physic, and of all other

arts and sciences, were originally private opinions ; probably they would have been so still, had the inventors been prohibited publishing, or the public examining and receiving them. But now, mankind form into societies, impart their own discoveries, offer rewards to other inventors or improvers of arts and sciences ; and what follows ? What might be expected ; the perfection of science. Thus Cicero accounts for that literary pre-eminence which Greece had over Rome ; and thus in all nations and in all ages will the same effects follow the same causes ; in England as in Rome the maxim is true, *honus alit artes*.

Numerous are the objections made to this doctrine ; there are, however, but two that are worth answering. The first is, that christianity is perfect and entire in the holy Scriptures, that herein it differs from human arts and sciences, that therefore the inquisitiveness necessary for the latter would be highly injurious to the former. To which it may be justly answered, that many people doubt this, as the church of Rome, whose notion is too fully expressed by Cardinal Hosius, who said that the Scriptures were of no more authority than Æsop's fables, were it not for the authority of the church ; as the people called Quakers, who consider the holy Scriptures as a secondary rule subordinate to the spirit ; and many others wholly deny their divinity. Now ought not all these people to be allowed the liberty of examining the proofs of the divinity and perfection of the

Bible? For private judgment which is their malady is also their only medicine. But let the perfection of the holy canon be granted. It will amount to no more than granting the perfection of the works of nature. In both, *invisible things, even the eternal power and Godhead* are to be *seen and UNDERSTOOD by the things that are made*. The word of revelation, like the works of nature, presents objects to view, but objects to be examined and understood; and how can this be without the right of private judgment?

You say the Scriptures give a perfect account of the nature of God, the nature of man, the vanity of the life that now is, the certainty of the life that is to come; but how is another man to know this, unless you allow him to examine and determine for himself? It may be a perfect rule, it may be a subordinate rule, it may be a false rule, it may be no rule at all, for any thing he knows who must not examine, or if he examines must not determine; for to retain the meaning is to retain the book; and there is no real difference between denying the examination and denying the conclusion. You know the story of father Fulgentio, preaching at Venice on Pilate's question, *What is truth?* He told his hearers that at last after many searches he had found it out, and held out a New Testament, and said, that there it was in his hand; but then he put it in his pocket, and coldly said; *But the book is prohibited*. Now what great difference would there have been, if he

had said, *You may read the book, but its true meaning is prohibited?* Yet this is what all the Arminian clergy in England must say, if they speak consistently with themselves; for in the opinion of all impartial judges the established religion is Calvinism.

The other objection is, that this will open a door to all sorts of heresies, and the truth will be oppressed and disappear. Indeed! And is truth such a timorous, cowardly thing? What idle fears are these! Should an honest man be taxed with dissoluteness and impiety, and should any propose to him a fair trial before impartial judges, would he be frightened at it, think you? Christianity is not to be loaded with calumnies, she is so already, her only hope is a fair trial.

But to abridge the matter. Do not facts contradict this? Is not the church of Rome full of heresy? Have not the Gospel and the right of private judgment gone hand in hand in the reformation? Are the power and promise of God nothing? Has he not engaged to support his church? Does not every thing proposed to men relate to some operation of their minds? Does not a rational fancy protect the truth of imagery in poetry, and an honest conscience religion? Strange errors have been proposed which the penetration of church governors could neither foresee, nor provide against; and it has happened to them as to monstrous images in poems; they are dead, and buried, and exploded, and the public taste not injured thereby.

ON THE
NATURE AND OBJECTS
OF
BAPTISM,
AS REGARDING CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

[THE article here selected makes a part only of an essay entitled, *The General Doctrine of Toleration applied to the particular Case of Free Communion*. It has a direct reference to that portion of the Baptist denomination, who hold to what is called close communion, or the doctrine, that no persons are qualified to be members of a christian church, who have not been baptized by immersion. The author pleads for a mixed communion, by which persons baptized in infancy are received into Baptist churches, provided such persons are satisfied with the validity of their own baptism, as having in their opinion been performed according to the spirit and intention of the Gospel.

Robinson argues, that this kind of fellowship is allowable, because the New Testament nowhere enjoins any particular mode of baptism, as an absolutely essential qualification for being a member of the true church of Christ. He goes farther, and

proves, that there is no positive command requiring baptism in any form, as a prerequisite for church communion. This is left to the conscience and judgment of every christian. Any one sincerely believing the Gospel, and thinking it his duty to approach the Lord's table, cannot be rightfully denied this privilege, although he may not be convinced that the law of Christ demands his submission to the ordinance of baptism. The author considers both of the ordinances as of divine institution, and as designed for every christian; but at the same time he does not suppose there is any immediate connexion between them, nor that any christian minister or church has a right to refuse one to a brother, who may desire it, because he cannot see his way clear to participate of both. There is as much impropriety in withholding the Lord's supper till baptism be performed, as there would be in refusing baptism till the person had become a communicant. Neither the Saviour nor the Apostles have declared, that either of these shall precede the other, nor that one shall be denied, if the other have not been complied with.

Such are the views of the author as expressed at large in this essay, where they are unfolded with his usual freedom and perspicuity, and with more than his usual method, closeness of thought, and sound argument. This may be ranked among his best specimens of composition, and has almost none of his peculiar defects. He has succeeded in checking the busy meddlings of his fancy, which, on other occasions, is too apt to lead him astray, and prove a treacherous guide to his taste and judgment. He thought the subject of high importance, as it truly is, in its bearing on the principles and practice of christian fellowship. If his views are correct, and he

brings scripture and reason to prove them so, many of the formidable barriers, which have been raised to keep christians asunder, to frighten the timid and harden the obstinate, to scatter the brands of discord and heat the fire of persecution, may be pulled down, and the ground left open and free where all the sincere disciples of Jesus may meet in love and peace, in fellowship and kind feeling.

One head of the essay relating to the history of the controversy concerning free communion, among the Baptists, and also a few closing reflections, are omitted, as not immediately connected with the subject of baptism, to which the parts of the essay here given are confined.]

THE most diligent and upright disciples of Jesus Christ have always entertained, and do yet entertain various sentiments concerning articles of faith and modes of divine worship, and there are but *two* ways of acting among christians in this case.

The first, which the far greater part profess to pursue, is that of obtaining, some way or other, unity of faith, and uniformity of practice. In the papal corporation, and in some reformed communities, riches and power contend with weakness and want to silence scruples, and to force a real or professed uniformity. In some of our nonconformist churches, learning, argument, and beneficence are employed to produce the same effect. At length, however, unquestionable facts prove, that, how upright soever the attempt may be, the end is unattainable. The mind of man, uncontrolled in its operations, and for

ever diversifying its modes of thinking, refuses to submit to restraint, and it is the virtue of such a mind to avow its refusal.

If uniformity cannot be obtained, say the other, and the smaller part of christians, there remains only one thing for us to do ; we must so constitute our churches as to *allow* variety of sentiment and practice, and by so doing acknowledge the force of nature for the voice of God. Let us put, say they, *toleration* in the place of uniformity ; *this* can never be produced ; but *that* lies within the reach of every society.

The English nonconformists have, of all mankind, best understood, and most practised christian liberty ; but there have arisen in many of their churches, as may naturally be supposed of men zealous for their religious principles, doubts and debates concerning the *extent* of that toleration, which christian liberty implies, but which, however, ought not to run into licentiousness, as it would if it went so far as to hazard the purity of gospel worship and order.

Under this consideration comes the well known controversy among our Baptist congregations, whether churches consisting of members all baptized by immersion on a profession of faith and repentance, ought to admit into their fellowship such persons as profess faith and repentance, and desire communion with them, but refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they account they have been rightly bap-

tized by sprinkling in their infancy. To this question, and to this only, we shall confine our attention.

This whole debate, I should suppose, may be divided into a case of *fact* and a case of *right*.

CASE OF FACT. On the one hand, it is a matter of fact, that many sincere disciples of Christ declare, that, having renounced all authority except that of the holy Scriptures to decide in all matters of faith and practice, and having searched the Scriptures with all the diligence and rectitude, of which they are capable, they think infant baptism of divine appointment, and rightly performed by sprinkling water on the face.

It is a matter of fact, that many baptist churches do conscientiously admit such persons into their fellowship.

It is also a fact, that these churches affirm, and they are best capable of giving evidence in this case, that no inconvenience has arisen to them from the mixture of their communion. The writer of this has been a member of such a church more than twenty years, but has never heard of the least disadvantage arising to the community from it, and he has received a like attestation from the ministers of several other mixed churches.

Further, it is a fact, that these members perform all the duties of church fellowship, glorify God in their lives and conversations, and support the charac-

ter of christians as honourably as the baptist brethren do.

Moreover, it is a matter of fact, that some churches have been mixed from before the time of the civil war in the reign of Charles I. when the baptists first made their public appearance in England.

In fine, it is an undeniable fact, that, during the time of the great papal apostacy, while churches were congregated in private for fear of prelatical persecution, believers, who held infant baptism, and believers, who disowned it, were united in the same community, as ancient manuscripts and authentic records abundantly prove.

On the other hand, it is certain, that, from the first public appearance of baptist churches in England, many have refused, and to this day continue to refuse to admit into their fellowship all manner of persons, however qualified in other respects, who have not been baptized by immersion on their own profession of faith and repentance.

It is equally true, that all these baptists allow the piety and virtue of unbaptized believers, account them members of the mystical body of Christ, and some of them possessors of knowledge and piety far superior to their own, and they hold themselves bound to discharge every kind office to them, except this one of admitting them to church fellowship.

It is a fact, that these churches do not believe baptism a saving ordinance, nor do they think it a test of

true religion, nor do they hold that unbaptized believers ought not to be tolerated in a state, nor do they deny any intelligent being the right of private judgment ; they only refuse to tolerate infant baptism in their own churches.

It is also a clear fact, that these baptists affirm, their refusal does not proceed from wilful ignorance, obstinacy, spirit of party, bigotry, or any other illiberal disposition ; but from a fear of offending God by acting without a sufficient warrant from his written word, the rule of all religious conduct. Their testimony ought to be admitted, because they are the best judges of their own motives, because the general conduct of their lives confirms their testimony, and because (of some of them it must be allowed) they extend candour and compliments and polite professions of liberality of sentiment far, very far indeed, beyond what some of their brethren, who hold free communion, pretend to do.

Moreover, it is a fact unquestionable, that, as some independent churches practising free communion have admitted so many baptists members, that the latter have in time formed a great majority, who have chosen a baptist minister, through whose influence the church has become a baptist church ; so, on the contrary, some baptist churches holding free communion have admitted so many unbaptized members, that the churches have in time chosen ministers, who held infant baptism, and lost the ordinance of baptism by immersion.

Lastly, it is matter of fact, that the primitive churches, those in Greece, that at Rome, and all others, were originally constituted baptist churches, and that they lost the ordinance of baptism, along with the doctrines of the Gospel, and the very nature and essence of christian churches, not by practising a wise toleration towards men of allowed piety, but by setting up certain external qualifications of church members, which in time became tests of orthodoxy, to which wicked men could and did conform, under pretence of authority from Christ to establish uniformity.

All these are *facts*, but none of these constitute *christian law*, and, if we would ascertain what is right, we must distinguish what *is* from what *ought to be*.

CASE OF RIGHT. The question before us is, **RIGHT** to church fellowship, and our inquiry must necessarily be, What makes it just and right for churches to admit of mixed communion? The proper answer to this inquiry, on the allowed principles of all disputants, is, **THE REVEALED WILL OF JESUS CHRIST**, the original projector of church fellowship, and the sole legislator in all the assemblies of his saints.

In strict adherence to this truly protestant ground of action, and in order to try out the question as fairly and clearly as we can, we will ascertain *the judge* of the controversy, and *the law* of the case; and in

order to this we will turn the subject on both sides, and first show negatively what does *not* make the law of the case, and then positively what *does*.

FIRST, then, nothing can be determined concerning the right in question from the *universal consent*, real or pretended, of *men out of our own community*.

We divide these into *four* classes, and, although we have all due regard for them, yet we reject each apart, and all together, as judges pronouncing law in this case.

1. The *fathers* are incompetent, for, if any thing in their writings looks like the case before us, it is the case of heretical baptism; but the amount of all our inquiries on this article would be, that one says yea, and another says nay, and both refer us to Jesus Christ, and so we leave off where we began.

2. *Roman Catholics*, both in council and out of it, are incompetent; for their proper work is not investigation of truth, much less determining protestant controversies; but submission to infallible papal authority.

3. *Polemical divines, and pious ones too, in established reformed churches*, utter no law here. The case in hand never came, never could come seriously before them, and, if it had, having previously resigned the right of judging for themselves by subscribing a religious test, they could not prudently, or even uprightly, give an opinion in direct contradiction to it. All baptists judge, that these divines are mistaken in

every part of baptism, in the nature, the subject, the mode, and the end of it, and this is one reason of their dissent from them ; they cannot therefore consistently allow their opinions on baptism and church government the force of law.

4. *Learned critics*, foreign or domestic, have no occasion to interfere in this case, nor can they be offended at our affirming, that the christian church stands in no need of their assistance in this point now before them, for this plain reason, it is not a learned question. It would be a great misfortune to a company of plain, homely christians in church fellowship, if any case pertaining to life and godliness must cost fifteen hundred pounds worth of Latin and Greek to make it evident and clear.

Should all these four classes of writers agree to make baptism necessary to salvation, necessary to a civil office, necessary to receiving the Lord's supper, necessary to the honour of being enrolled in the parish register while we live, and necessary to that of putrifying among our neighbours after we are dead, and should any baptist so far forget himself as to urge this universal consent as argument why *we* should not admit the persons in question to the Lord's table ; I will venture to say, it would be an unfair appeal to the sheepishness of some, and the modesty of others, in a case of conscience, where only scripture is law, and Christ alone is judge.

SECONDLY, nothing can be argued for or against this right from the *great names in our own churches* employed in this controversy. Gale and Foster, Bunyan and Kiffin, along with all the moderns, before whom the case actually came, and who had personal interest in deciding it, are respectable as counsel pleading on different sides of the question, and we calmly attend to what they say ; but none of their opinions constitute the *law* of the case.

THIRDLY, nothing can be determined for it from *general notions* of benevolence and usefulness, nor against it from zealous and upright intentions of preserving purity of doctrine and order ; for in a case that comes under written revealed law, as the constitution of christian churches evidently does, general dispositions must be regulated by particular directions.

FOURTHLY, neither can one side infer the right in question from *any particular case* mentioned in the New Testament, nor can the other support their plea against it by the silence of the New Testament ; for the truth is, infant baptism was not then known, and consequently the case of admitting to fellowship persons baptized in infancy does not occur there.

FIFTHLY, *no accidental circumstances* can determine this matter. There have fallen into this controversy, as into all others, a collection of what I call accidental circumstances, and which have been

argued upon, and have led off the attention of the inquirer from the case in hand. For example ;

1. *Cases* have been supposed and urged, as that of admitting Jesuits, and Quakers, and others ; but these suppositions prove nothing. Lawyers say truly, there is nothing so hard to find, as a case in point. These cases are not in point, for they never did happen, they never can happen, and were they to happen they would not be *this* case, and they must be investigated on other principles, and rejected for other reasons. Neither supposed cases urged on one side, nor real cases allowed on the other, constitute the law of this case.

2. *The motives, tempers, and views* of the disputants decide nothing. A sour, surly man may growl and grumble truth, a well bred man may warble melodious nonsense, a sincere disputant may be a very silly fellow, and a man right in his principles may be wrong in his motives of defending them.

3. *Mistakes and self-contradictions* in writers yield no argument against the general truth, which they are defending. If upright men sometimes in the heat of controversy forget themselves, we should do worse than they, were we to magnify their frailty into a crime, and their crime into a rule of action. On the other hand, an argument may be uniform, and free from self-contradiction, and yet it may not hit the case.

4. *Frightful consequences*, affixed by one writer to the arguments of another, ought not to be urged as decisive reasoning constituting the law of a case.

In short, the right or wrong of this case is determinable only by the written revealed will of God, a test of truth, which all the parties will allow.

Having thus cleared the court of a bustling, noisy crowd, that do no good because they give no evidence, and do a deal of harm because they perplex the question by throwing in a quantity of foreign matter, let us proceed to investigate what is the law of *Christ* in this case.

We affirm, then, that it is JUST, and RIGHT, and agreeable to the revealed will of Christ, that Baptist churches should admit into their fellowship such persons as desire admission on profession of faith and repentance, although they refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they sincerely believe they have been rightly baptized by sprinkling in their infancy.

By way of explanation, I beg leave to distinguish what our divines call the *esse*, or the *being* of a church, from the *melius esse*, or *best being* of one; for, although I affirm such a mixt church to be a rightly constituted church, yet I do not say its constitution is so perfect as that of the primitive churches. A church that tolerates is a good church; but a church that has no errors to tolerate is a better. We do not, therefore, blame those churches, which

were never required to admit unbaptized believers, for maintaining strict communion ; we only say, where the requisition is made, a compliance with it is just and right.

In support of this sentiment, we beg leave to offer *two sorts* of arguments, the first taken from those *general principles of analogy*, on which, the Scriptures declare, the christian church is founded ; and the second from the *express laws of Jesus Christ* recorded in scripture for the regulation of our conduct.

God is an intelligent being. An intelligent being exercises his intelligence when he constructs any exterior work, and the work will resemble the intelligence of its maker. A wise and beneficent being will naturally and necessarily form a work full of beneficence and wisdom. Should a perfect being create a world, it would be a world expressive of his invisible perfections ; should he form a church in this world, it would be a church constituted on similar principles ; and, if skill and compassion were excellencies of his nature, compassion and skill might be expected in the construction of his church. There would be an analogy, or resemblance, between the ties of nature and the social bonds of grace.

We find, on reading the New Testament, that God is the author of christianity, the creator of the christian church, that he hath displayed the eminence of his perfections in the construction of it, and that

he hath inviolably preserved an analogy between the natural and preternatural worlds. This is the true ground of all the parables, in which Christ taught his heavenly doctrine, and of all the discourses, by which he displayed the conduct of God to men under resemblances of a father and his sons, a shepherd and his flock, a husbandman and his lands, and so on. For the same reasons, we are expressly told of the aboundings, or abundance, of the wisdom and prudence, the power and pity, the forbearance and patience, love and compassion of God toward his church. He exercises the same attributes in the church as in the world, with this only difference, the display is brightest in the first. This is what we call analogy, and from this general source we derive many particular arguments from the nature and fitness of things in defence of our proposition.

First ; It is just, and right, and agreeable to the nature and fitness of things, that we should *diminish evils and difficulties, which we are not able wholly to remove*. There are in nature a thousand obstacles in the way of every just pursuit. Agriculture, commerce, navigation, literature, government, civil and domestic, are all attended with difficulties, some of which threaten the subversion of the whole. It should seem better, at first sight, that no obstacles should exist to discourage such just and laudable pursuits ; but they do exist, and we cannot help their existence, yea, perhaps their existence may be neces-

sary to give being and exercise to some of the finest abilities and virtues of mankind.

Our skill, and our duty too, consist neither in wholly removing these evils, for that is not in our power, nor in remaining plaintive and inactive, doing nothing where much may be done, though not all we wish ; but in diminishing these ills, and in making the most and best of such materials as providence hath actually put into our hands. Every projector of a great design exercises his penetration in foreseeing what obstacles may obstruct the execution of it, and much of his skill lies in providing against them.

We apply this to the case in hand. Christianity is highly fitted, and admirably adapted to the actual state and condition of men and things in this world. It was excellently said by Jesus Christ, *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*, implying that positive religion was so contrived as to yield in certain cases to natural and necessary contingencies. The man, who uses all diligence to obtain evidence of believers' baptism, and cannot obtain it, and yet desires admission to the Lord's table, throws a difficulty in the way of the church, a difficulty too, which they cannot remove ; but the question is, can they not diminish it? It hath pleased God to give this man faith in Christ and moral obedience ; but it does not please him to give him light into adult baptism. He does not belong to the world, he does not desire to trouble the church, he only

wishes for a peaceable admission to fellowship ; we cannot give him knowledge, we cannot baptize him without it ; but we can admit him to the Lord's table, and so build God's house with the best materials we have. It is a case of insurmountable difficulty ; it cannot be wholly removed ; but it may be diminished. This argument is taken from that *analogy* which there evidently is between the economy of nature and that of christianity ; and, if it be a less evil for an unbaptized believer to be incorporated in the church than to lie exposed in the world, the reasoning is valid.

Secondly ; It is fit, and right, and agreeable to the nature of things, that there should be *no disqualification where there is no crime*. On this principle we argue against a sacramental test in the episcopal church. Christian churches are free states, and full fellowship is the new birthright of every regenerate man. The candidate for fellowship, who has examined believers' baptism by immersion, and cannot obtain evidence of the truth of it, is indeed in a state in which his knowledge is imperfect ; but his imperfection is innocent, because he hath exercised all the ability and virtue he has, and his ignorance is involuntary, yea, perhaps he may have exercised ten times more industry and application, though without success, than many others, who have obtained evidence. To deny church fellowship to persons of genuine virtue, and of, it may be, superior virtue too, is to *affix* a disgrace and inflict a punishment both without

an offence, and in violation of a right. This is a case of involuntary error, and there is, there can be no moral turpitude in it. Where there is allowed virtue in the general course of a man's actions, and no moral evil in one particular imperfection, it is not imaginable that any punishment should be inflicted, or any benefit of society denied. Now as we all agree, that Christ hath constituted his church on principles of *equity*, it should seem, this argument is valid and of force.

Thirdly ; It is just, and right, and agreeable to the nature of things, that *all men should be placed in that condition, in which they can do most good*. By this rule we determine what is usually denominated *a call in providence*, and an all-sufficient rule it is. Now, by excluding the persons in question from church fellowship, we deprive the church of many wise and worthy members, who might become extremely useful, and we deny them the liberty of exercising such abilities as God gave them for the public edification. If Christ constituted his church on a principle of promoting the greatest *social* good, it should seem, this argument also ought to have its weight.

Fourthly ; It is just and right in virtuous communities, that *a visible difference should be put between the righteous and the wicked*. If hatred of sin and love of holiness were principles of constructing the christian church, as they certainly were, this argument too is good. The candidate in question is not

rejected on account of any thing in common with the rest of exempts ; he is neither an infidel, nor an immoral man, yet he is as really excluded as they are. This is a confounding of characters essentially different, which should seem unwarrantable in a society professedly incorporated for the purpose of separating and distinguishing them. Shall *he that sweareth*, and *he that feareth an oath*, be held at equal distance from the Lord's table, and all the other benefits of church fellowship ?

Fifthly ; It would argue great unfitness in any scheme of religion for this world, if it made no provision for human imperfections. If a plan of religion provided for the wilful perpetration of vice, it would be a scheme fit for infernal spirits. If it provided only for perfect knowledge and virtue, it would be a plan fit for only angels to realize ; but if, while it provided for eminent attainments of knowledge and goodness, it provided also for imperfections, that is, for small and inferior degrees of science and moral excellence ; if it provided for increase of knowledge and virtue, though accompanied with much ignorance and weakness, then would it commend itself for a divine system fitted by perfect wisdom and goodness for frail, imperfect men. The candidates, for whom we plead, are allowed to possess that general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, from which all knowledge and all good actions proceed ; but they have not yet attained those peculiar exercises of it,

which produce some particular parts of obedience ; however, it seems fit and right, that they should be permitted to perform all they do know, and patiently borne with till they are able to make further progress. If Jesus Christ constituted his church on principles of *patience* and forbearance, condescension and long-suffering, it should seem, this argument also ought to have some authority over us.

From arguments of this sort, and we omit many which might be adduced, there arises a high probability, that it is just and right for christian churches to admit of free communion.

Were these reasonings on the nature of things alone, and were they unconnected with revelation, and unsupported by it, they would come under the description of general dispositions not regulated by particular directions, and consequently they ought not to be urged in this controversy as decisive in point of right or law ; but when we examine the Scriptures, and find, that christianity is actually constituted on these principles, that these are adopted as grounds of the divine conduct to us and rules of our actions to one another, we have a right to conclude, that these arguments are fair, valid, and conclusive.

We have not hesitated to affirm, that God was the original projector of those associated bodies of men for divine worship, which we call christian churches. We have made no scruple of affirming that the original projector formed these churches on principles of

wisdom, equity, compassion, love of holiness, and so on. We have not quoted passages of scripture to prove this ; for the point is beyond contradiction, and the quotations would be endless. If these should be accounted only probable arguments, we trust the next will produce demonstration.

Our second class of arguments we take from EXPRESS LAWS OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP, contained in the written revealed will of our excellent legislator.

First ; We argue from his *law of exclusion*. There are in the New Testament many lists of persons, who may not be admitted into the christian church in this world, and who will be denied an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Some of these lists are general, others descend to particulars ; but there is no mention of the persons now before us in any of them. Had the law of exclusion been made by a legislator who could not pry into futurity, it might be imagined he did not foresee the case, he did not know that such persons would ever appear ; but there is no room to urge this ; for our lawgiver was a prophet, and a tender prophet, who foresaw all future periods and persons, and forewarned his church of every thing that would endanger the constitution of it.

The natural tendency of every good man is to associate with other good men, and to go with them into the enjoyment of every immunity, that belongs to

their society ; and his apparent right to enjoy all the comforts, as well as to suffer all the crosses of his condition is so highly probable, that nothing less than a clear, positive, express law of exclusion seems necessary to empower any church to refuse his claim. If there be no such law, and none such there is, we cannot help saying to the candidate before us,—*Come in, thou blessed of the Lord ; wherefore standest thou without ?*

Secondly ; We argue from his *law of toleration*. The particular case of the persons in question, we allow, is not mentioned in the New Testament ; but a general law including this, and many more such cases, is published, and answers the end better than the insertion of any particular case could have done. This law is, that all christians should enjoy unmolested IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH the right of private judgment. In a multitude of passages in the New Testament, the disciples of Christ are exhorted to judge for themselves in all matters of religion and conscience, and this right of self-determination is vindicated not only against magistrates, philosophers, and rabbies, but against fellow members, as in the xivth of romans ; and even against inspired Apostles, as in the 8th and 10th verses of the xxiiid of Matthew. By this law we are bound to allow a universal toleration in all matters, that do not destroy the essence of gospel worship.

Before we proceed it will be necessary to explain our meaning, and an answer to three plain questions will sufficiently do so. First, *What* do we plead for? We answer, A free toleration of the right of private judgment. There is in our churches, strictly speaking, no such thing as public faith; our standard of faith is the holy Scripture, and whatever we publish beside are the private sentiments of different men, and different communities; and it is questionable whether any two churches so exactly agree as *bonâ fide* to constitute an uniformity. Now we plead for the allowance of this right to unbaptized believers. What one of our churches allows to another of our churches, that, we suppose, each church ought to allow to all its own members, and to all good men. Secondly, *Where* do we plead for the free exercise of this right to be tolerated? We answer, not in the state, that our civil governors allow, but in the church. We do not only affirm, that unbaptized believers have a natural right to freedom in Britain, so that they may congregate, and form churches of their own faith and order; but we affirm, that they have a scriptural right to their own faith and order in our churches. It will be objected, this would destroy our own faith and order. In answer to this, we propose a third question,—*How far* is this toleration to extend, and where shall we draw the line? We answer, in general, toleration ought to extend as far as is consis-

tent with purity of faith and order ; and of this each church ought to judge for itself.

If we descend to particulars, we must observe, that the objects of toleration are two, errors of faith, and irregularities of practice. In regard to faith, we must distinguish between the *facts* recorded in scripture, such as the birth, life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension, second coming, judgment, and universal dominion of Christ, from *reasonings* upon these facts ; they are the latter that are the proper objects of toleration. He who denies the facts is an infidel, he does not believe the record God has given of his Son, and consequently he is not a disciple of Christ, and so can have no claim to sit at his table. A man, who does believe the facts, but who reasons obliquely upon them, is a believer, and he ought to be tolerated though he is an inconclusive reasoner. The other object of toleration is irregularity of practice. Christian obedience is submission to two sorts of precepts, the one moral, the other positive. The object of toleration in moral obedience is that sort of improper action, which proceeds not from malice, but from infirmity. The object of toleration in positive obedience is that sort of irregularity, which proceeds from innocent mental error. Now this kind of toleration, while it provides for the peace and prosperity of the church, and for the ease of tender consciences, neither destroys the essence of christianity nor the purity of gospel worship.

In effect, we do tolerate in all our churches each of these imperfections.

1. In regard to *faith*. A church believing the mediation of Jesus Christ, which is a fact, admits a believer of this fact to fellowship, although he thinks it was necessary in order to this mediation that the human soul of Christ should pre-exist his incarnation. In such a case the church distinguishes between the fact, that Christ is a mediator, which the member believes, and his false reasoning upon the fact, that it was necessary the human soul of Christ should be first created, and that it should exist in heaven before his incarnation, in order to mediate between God and man in behalf of the Old Testament saints. The same may be said of many other cases. We repeat it again, the clear facts recorded in scripture are not objects of toleration, and a denier of them is an infidel ; but errors in reasoning concerning these facts, such as the time and mode of their existence, and so on, are objects of toleration, and of a toleration every way safe to the facts themselves.

2. In regard to the toleration of *moral* irregularities, it is certain we are obliged to make, and do actually make the distinction above mentioned. We exclude members for such immoral actions as proceed from malice, and hatred of virtue ; but we never think of expelling any for such immoral actions as proceed from infirmity. For example. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,*

is a moral law, founded in the nature and fitness of things; and should any member of our churches, with malicious motives, and on purpose to injure another, violate this law, we should expel him as a hater of morality, an enemy to the rights of all mankind, whom he attacked in the one injured person; but if another, without any apparent malice, and merely to gratify a silly infirmity, a love of tattling and chattering, take up a false report rashly, and tell it carelessly to the injury of his brother, we should not expel this man. We should pity him, and pray for him, and exhort him to exercise more caution for the future; and, though we knew he had not such an absolute government of his tongue as the law required, yet we should tolerate him, and such a toleration would not in the least endanger the law.

3. In respect to irregularities in *obedience to positive precepts*, we all exercise a toleration of these in an ample manner, except in the one article before us, to which some of us object. Our churches have never yet agreed on the number of positive institutes. All hold two, Baptism and the Lord's supper; some add a third, the Sunday sabbath; others several more, as worshipping God by singing, anointing the sick with oil, abstaining from things strangled and from blood, and so on. We tolerate irregularities in all these cases, and we have instances of pastors, who observe the Jewish sabbath, exercising the pastoral office with the highest honour both to the church

and themselves, in congregations that profane the Jewish sabbath, and hold the Sunday sabbath to be a positive divine institute. Now as all positive institutes proceed from the same legislator, and ought all to be treated with equal reverence, and as we tolerate irregularities in some of them without any danger to the general law of obedience to positive religion, what imaginable good reason can be produced for making an exception in the case of unbaptized believers ?

This kind of toleration is professedly treated of in the xivth chapter of Romans, and the inspired Apostle defends it on the principles which we have laid down. There is, he affirms, no moral turpitude in mental errors, and the toleration of them is perfectly consistent with the safety of the church, the purity of the faith, and the order of divine worship.

The believer who was baptized in his infancy, claims a right to church fellowship ; the church judges he has not been baptized, but he judges he has been baptized in his infancy by sprinkling according to Christ's institution. Now this is his own case ; it is a case of innocent irregularity in obeying a positive institute, and he ought to be allowed to judge for himself. Here the fort of those who refuse admission to such members, falls to the ground. They reason thus. All churches require persons to be baptized before they admit them to the Lord's supper ; now we deny that infant sprinkling is bap-

tism ; we therefore require persons, who have been sprinkled in infancy, to be baptized by immersion. When people reason thus for themselves they reason rightly ; but when they reason thus for another person they claim a right of judging for him, and consequently deny him that liberty of self-judging, which they themselves exercise under a law, which the common legislator ordained alike for both. We do not then plead for the admission of such a person because we think he hath been baptized, for in our opinion he hath not ; but because he judges he has been baptized ; and we have no authority to deprive him of the right of private judgment, but on the contrary we are expressly commanded to allow him the liberty of determining for himself.

If any reply, we allow his right of private judgment, and he may join a church of his own sentiments ; we answer, that does not alter the case ; you are required to allow the exercise of private judgment *in* your own community, not out of it, where your allowance and disallowance operate nothing.

Agreeably to this principle, when I have had the honour to assist in forming a christian church intending to hold mixed communion, I have first embodied the baptists, and they have afterwards admitted believers, who were satisfied with their infant baptism, on the footing of toleration. The whole christian church, in my opinion, was thus *planted in this likeness of Christ's death*, and at the same time the laws

of christian liberty and toleration were delivered to them to be made use of as the exigencies of the times should require.

We will conclude this head with two remarks.

1. When an unbaptized believer appears before the brethren at a church meeting, and, professing faith and repentance, requires admission into church fellowship, the true question before the church is not whether he have been baptized, but whether he may judge for himself. 2. No instance can be produced of any Apostle presuming to judge for any primitive christian, and making his opinion the ground of that christian's conduct. On the contrary, instances may be produced of an inspired Apostle's declaring himself of one opinion on positive institutes, and pleading for the liberty of christians to embrace another. *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing unclean, to him it is unclean. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.*

Thirdly; Let us attend to the law of baptism itself in its original institution. While we pay all due reverence to a divine institute, we ought not to make more of it than the instructor made; neither ought we to remove it from that place in which his wisdom set it. Baptism has been called an *initiating* ordinance, that is, an ordinance by which we enter into something. Let us remember this is not a scriptural definition of baptism, nor is it admissible except in a

qualified sense. It certainly was not an ordinance by which the first baptists entered into church fellowship; for into what church did the disciples of John enter by baptism? Was Jesus Christ admitted a member of a christian church by baptism? Or into what church did the Eunuch enter, when Philip alone baptized him in the desert. Believers indeed entered on a public profession of christianity in general by baptism, and that was all. If some were added to the church immediately after baptism, it may not be amiss to recollect that it was immediately after a sermon too, and if this connexion of events afforded any argument for the nature and place of baptism, it might as well be applied to the nature and place of a sermon, and preaching might be denominated an initiating ordinance. The truth is, preaching produced conversion, conversion baptism, baptism acquaintance and conversation with church members, and conversation church fellowship. When we receive and use an ordinance for all the ends for which it was instituted we have done all that is required of us; but when we employ it to other ends, the least that can be said of us is, we are wise above what is written. Zeal may animate us; but even zeal, when it does not follow knowledge, will misguide us.

General and vague as this description of the law of baptism is, it is sufficient for all the ends, for which we produce it; however, it may serve to elucidate our meaning, if we be more explicit.

We affirm, then, that baptism is not a *church* ordinance, that it is not naturally, necessarily, and actually connected with church fellowship, and consequently that the doctrine of *initiating* into the christian church by baptism is a confused association of ideas, derived from masters whose disciples it is no honour to be.

Baptism, we allow, is a positive institute of the New Testament, and ought to be practised till the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ; but, that it is not a New Testament *church* ordinance is clear, for it was administered several years before the Jewish economy was dissolved, and consequently before there were any such congregated societies in the world as we call christian churches. When John the Baptist came first preaching and baptizing, Jesus, who afterward founded the christian church, lived a private life at Nazareth ; he did not enter on his ministry till the death of John, and he did not dissolve the Jewish ecclesiastical state till his own death. People were baptized all this time on a general profession of faith in the Messiah, and repentance towards God. This notion of baptism was preserved after the resurrection of Christ, and after christian churches had been congregated by his order, as appears by the baptism of the Eunuch, who indeed made a profession of faith, but was not associated to any particular christian church.

Much has been said, in pretended proof of the place of baptism, concerning the order of Christ's words in that commission to baptize, which he gave his Apostles; it is recorded in the last chapter of Matthew; but, if this trite method of reasoning amounted to argument, we might form one thus. Christ instituted the Lord's supper before his death. Christ made baptism a positive christian institute after his resurrection. Therefore the Lord's supper ought to be received before we are baptized.

In a word, the law of christian baptism is, that believers in Christ should publicly avow their faith in him, and their resolution to obey him, by being baptized; and the proper time for this is after believing and before admission to fellowship; however, as there was no original and actual, so there is no natural and necessary connexion between baptism and fellowship. Baptism was an initiation into the profession of christianity at large, not into the practice of it in any particular church.

This is the law, and, we think, the whole law of baptism, and we plead this law in favour of the right of unbaptized believers to the Lord's supper, for two plain and obvious reasons. 1. A command to perform one duty is not a prohibition of another duty. *Keep the sabbath day holy* is one command, and *honour thy father* is another; but as there is no necessary connexion between the two, a breach of the first does not release from an obligation to the last.

Baptism and the Lord's supper are both commanded; but a law to perform one does not prohibit the observance of the other; the unbaptized believer's way to the Lord's table is therefore clear. 2. It is remarkable, that this positive law of baptism is not enforced by any penalties, and herein it differs from all other positive institutes. By what right then do we affix to the breach of it such a severe penalty as exclusion from church fellowship? After all, our candidates neither deny the right of Christ to give laws, nor that he hath given the law of baptism, nor that they are bound to obey it; their error lies in an innocent mistake concerning the proper subject, and the right mode of administering it. There is no penalty affixed to this mistake, and one law is not a prohibition, or repeal of another law.

Fourthly; We argue for the right of our candidates *from the law of gifts*. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, he gave gifts unto men for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the general body of christians. To one he gave a discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, one had a gift of psalmody, another a doctrine, and another an interpretation; and when the whole church came together into one place, all these gifts were directed to the public edification.

It is the opinion of some, that all these spiritual gifts have been continued in the church in some degree ever since; and it is the thankful acknowl-

edgment of all, that a part of them have been perpetuated to this day. Whatever general gifts men receive from God, they receive under a natural obligation of employing and improving them, of improving them for themselves, and employing them for the benefit of others ; and whatever special ecclesiastical abilities good men receive from Christ, the Lord of the church, they receive both under a general obligation to use them, and under a special scriptural law to employ them in the church for the edification of the body.

Some unbaptized believers have received out of the fulness of Christ spiritual abilities ; one hath a gift of psalmody ; another a comprehensive knowledge of christian theology, and an aptitude to teach it to others ; a third excels in spiritual discernment, and so on ; and we have four remarks to make on their case.

1. The want of baptism does not incapacitate these men. The vigour of mental operations is not impaired by this defect. Neither fancy, judgment, memory, penetration, freedom of speech, courage, nor any other excellence that goes into the composition of a spiritual gift, is annihilated or debilitated on that account ; so that they are sufficient to the work of edifying the body of Christ.

2. There is no express law in the New Testament, no prohibition against the use of these abilities on account of the imperfection of baptism, no pre-

cedent of exclusion, no trace or distant hint of any such thing.

3. There is an express law given to persons who have spiritual gifts, to make use of them. They are not only *given to every man to profit withal*, but a positive command is issued, that they should employ them in the church for general advantage. Call all these abilities of unbaptized believers *one talent*, if you please, and suppose the baptist brother to have two ; it will yet follow, that the one talent should not be hid in a napkin, but put to use, that, when the Lord comes, he may receive his own with improvements.

4. Christian societies cannot regularly employ these gifts among themselves, unless they admit the persons, who have them, to fellowship. An unbaptized believer, having spiritual abilities, would not proceed regularly, if he were to begin by demanding of the church a right to exercise his gifts among them for the public benefit, according to Christ's command. He should first demand fellowship. In such a case a people would reason justly if they allowed, that such a man had a right to exercise his abilities in the church ; that the church was obliged by law to allow and direct the exercise ; that they had no jurisdiction except over their own members, and consequently that right to exercise spiritual gifts included in itself right to church fellowship. The law, that obliges the candidate to exercise his gifts in

the church, and the law, that commands the church to employ him and to direct the exercise, both include in themselves an obligation to fellowship ; they oblige a candidate to join a church, and they oblige a church to admit him.

All our churches allow and employ neighbouring independent ministers to preach to them, and daily express a high and just regard for their useful labours ; yet, in their opinion, these men are unbaptized ; now we only ask such a toleration for members of their own congregations, as they daily exercise toward ministers of other congregations ; and we urge this for the former, because by their conduct to the latter they prove, that they do not hold the want of baptism to be either a natural or a legal incapacity.

Fifthly ; Let us advert to the law of constitution.

When the compassion of Christ induced him to descend into Judea to recover a profligate world to order, he brought along with him three sorts of excellencies ; a body of perfect wisdom, an assortment of holy affections, and a set of upright actions. Some degree of each of these he imparted to his disciples, and they to others, as assisted by his divine influence. All believers, therefore, have a threefold union to Christ ; an union of sentiment, for they believe what he believed and taught ; an union of affection, for they love and hate what he loved and hated ; what gave him pleasure gives them pleasure,

and what grieved him gives them pain ; and an union of practice, for they form their lives on his example. Hence arises an union to one another, as well as an union of all to Christ the head.

It is not imaginable, that any of the disciples of Christ possess these excellencies in such perfection as he possessed them ; nor is it to be supposed, that all possess them in such eminent degrees as some do ; however, there is a general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, *religious principle*, if you will, in all believers, on which the christian church is constituted.

All the laws of constituting New Testament churches are formed on this just notion of sacred social union, and our argument turns on the sufficiency of this *general excellence*, which is common to all believers, for all the ends and purposes of church fellowship.

The kingdom of Christ is an empire of truth and virtue, and it is not necessary to a residence in this kingdom that men should be perfect in either. A supreme love to truth as far as we know it, and a conscientious attachment to virtue as far as we have discovered it, are high qualifications, and all-sufficient for the duties and enjoyments of church communion. Now these are always found in the persons, for whose right we are pleading. They are partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel ; they have heard the word of truth, the Gospel of their salva-

tion ; the eyes of their understanding are enlightened ; they know the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints ; they have been quickened together with Christ ; and are made nigh by his blood ; they have access by one spirit unto the Father, and therefore they ought not to be accounted any more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and to be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

Persons thus qualified are equal to every duty of church fellowship, to singing, prayer, hearing, and even preaching the word, receiving the Lord's supper, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, in a word, to all the duties men owe as church members to themselves, to one another, and to God.

They, who answer such descriptions, are so very like the primitive christians, that, it must be allowed, the inducement to receive them into church fellowship is exceedingly strong, so strong, that nothing short of an express prohibition seems sufficient to their exclusion.

Here is one article, it will be said, in which these believers do not answer the description of the primitive christians ; they have not been baptized by immersion ; but, let it be observed, that baptism strictly speaking is neither repentance towards God, nor faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ; it is only a *profession* of

these graces, and church fellowship seems in the very nature of the thing to be connected with the *graces*, and neither with this, nor with any other peculiar mode of professing them. We are sure, the church triumphant is formed on a connexion between grace and glory, a profession of grace sometimes accompanying the connexion, and sometimes not; and we are taught to pray, *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Right to church fellowship either lies in grace alone, or in baptism alone, or in both united, or in something beyond them all. If it lie in grace alone, then faith in Christ and moral obedience have a merit in them, and church fellowship is a reward due to such merit. An humble christian will not allow this. If it lie in baptism alone, then an irreligious person may get himself baptized, and claim his right to church communion. If it lie in grace and baptism united, then a worse idea of merit than the former will return; for then it will follow, that baptism gives grace its value; but this is inadmissible. The truth is, right to church communion lies in that royal charter, which the clemency of God hath granted to mankind, and by which persons of certain descriptions, though imperfect in knowledge, defective in obedience, and encompassed with many infirmities, are allowed the favour of approaching him through the merit of Jesus Christ. Title to fellowship lies

in the divine charter, meetness for it in personal qualification.

This qualification, which I call *grace, general excellence, religious principle, supreme love to truth and virtue*, perfect in kind, imperfect in degree, is essential to church fellowship ; and the law of Christ is, that his churches should be constituted, of only such persons as actually possess this real, sterling goodness, which, being sufficient to answer all the ends for which churches are constituted, ought always to be considered as a clear warrant to admit to fellowship. Of such persons the primitive churches were constituted, and nothing can be clearer, than the divine testimony, that against such as these, who bring forth the spiritual fruits of *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*, against such there is no law.

Finally ; We urge in behalf of our candidates, the law of *release* and *deprivation*. We put these two together, because release from duty includes in it a deprivation of benefits. Jesus Christ found mankind in slavery ; his Gospel finds a sinner in that condition still ; but he both manumits and enfranchises this slave, he frees him from bondage, and invests him with privileges and immunities. This is done in the moment of regeneration, and henceforward this man ceaseth to be a servant of men in religious matters. He ceaseth to be his own, he becomes a subject of him, who died and rose again,

that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. The highest authority binds him to duty, and endows him with privilege ; and none but the highest authority can deprive him of one, or release him from the other. This undeniable fact is full to our purpose.

This argument is taken from that obligation, under which the legislator hath laid every good man, to perform the *moral* as well as the positive duties of church fellowship, and from which obligation neither their own imperfections, nor any church acts of ours, can or ought to discharge them. If we refuse to admit the believers in question into church fellowship, they owe us none of the *moral* duties, which belong to *that* condition, and it would be unreasonable in us to require them. When they build places of worship, support ministers, use hospitality, provide utensils for the celebration of ordinances, contribute toward maintaining the poor and relieving the sick members of the church, they do nothing but their duty, if they themselves be members ; but, if they be denied the benefit of membership, all these are works of supererogation. Now we argue, that God hath connected in the holy Scriptures duty with benefit, and that, having enjoined the duties on all believers, he intended all believers should reap the benefit of performing them. The Lord's supper is both a duty and a benefit ; Christ requires all his disciples to partake of the Lord's supper ; but, if we deny them the benefit,

we discharge them from the duty ; and the same may be said of all other church duties and benefits. Now, as we pretend to no authority to release from duty, how is it possible we should claim an authority to deprive of benefit ?

Many of these duties are moral duties, of natural and immutable obligation ; and such is the absolute necessity of obedience to them, that, when a man is so circumstanced as to be obliged either to omit a moral duty or a positive precept, the latter is in all cases to give way to the former. If obedience to positive precepts must subside to make room for obedience to moral precepts, how is it possible to conceive, that innocent ignorance of a *positive* precept should become a release from *moral* obligations ; and such are many of the duties of church fellowship.

Waiving for the present a multitude of arguments fairly and honestly deducible from scripture source, such as *the law of positive institutes*, and others, the sum of what we have said from the oracles of God is this. God, a being possessed of all possible perfections, is the author of christianity, the founder and friend of the christian church. He displayed the magnificence of his perfections in framing the whole, and continues to display it in governing every part. The same attributes, that pervade and direct all his natural empire, constitute and guide his moral dominion in the church. His wisdom leaves difficulties and obstacles, to us as immoveable as the decrees of

fate ; but he leaves them to excite and improve our mental abilities and moral excellencies, which he intends we should employ in diminishing them. His perfect justice never disqualifies without a crime. His benevolence produces the greatest social good. His love of holiness distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, and his patience and compassion bear with imperfections, both of knowledge and virtue ; hence we have inferred, that the admitting of an unbaptized believer to church fellowship is, ON THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY, a wise, a just, a benevolent, a holy, a humane action.

We have gone further ; we have examined many EXPRESS LAWS, given in writing by Jesus Christ to his church for the more easy administration of justice in it. There are laws of exclusion ; but unbaptized believers are not in the list. There are laws of toleration, which actually include their case. There is a law of baptism ; but this does not repeal any other law, nor prohibit the observance of any other positive institute. There is a law for the exercise of gifts, in which the incorporation of some is included ; and there is the law of constitution, which authorizes the incorporation of all good men. We have examined, finally, the law of release and deprivation, and we have thence inferred that the interests of morality, and the pleasures of christianity, if not diminished by excluding these persons, would, however, be greatly promoted by admitting them. We do not presume

to have exhausted the subject ; there remain many more reasons for the practice, which we have been defending ; but these are satisfactory to us, and, we think, they deserve consideration by our brethren ; however, the writer of this does not mean to lengthen out the controversy ; and, he hopes, should any think proper to deny all he has affirmed, no offence will be taken at his future silence. He would not seem to slight the admonitions of any good man ; but, on this article, his judgment is settled ; he has only to add, *Grace be with all them, that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity !*

REFLECTIONS
ON
CHRISTIAN LIBERTY,
CIVIL ESTABLISHMENTS IN RELIGION,
AND
TOLERATION.

FROM THE PREFACE TO THE THIRD VOLUME OF SAURIN.

VERY early in life I was prepossessed in favour of the following positions.

Christianity is a religion of divine original.

A religion of divine original must needs be a perfect religion, and answer all the ends, for which it was revealed, without human additions.

The christian religion hath undergone considerable alterations since the times of Jesus Christ, and his Apostles; and yet, *Jesus Christ* was then accounted *the finisher* as well as *the author of faith*.

The doctrines of revelation, as they lie in the inspired writings, differ very much from the same doctrines, as they lie in creeds of human composition.

The moral precepts, the positive institutes, and the religious affections, which constitute the devotion of most modern christians, form a melancholy contrast

to those, which are described by the guides, whom they profess to follow.

The light of nature, and that of revelation ; the operations of right reason, the spirit of the first, and the influence of the Holy Ghost, the soul of the last ; both proceeding from the same uniform Supreme Being, cannot be supposed to be destructive of each other, or even in the least degree to clash together.

The finest idea, that can be formed of the Supreme Being, is that of an infinite intelligence always in harmony with itself ; and, accordingly, the best way of proving the truth of revelation is that of showing the analogy of the plan of redemption to that of creation and providence. Simplicity and majesty characterize both nature and scripture ; simplicity reduces those benefits, which are essential to the real happiness of man, to the size of all mankind ; majesty makes a rich provision for the employment and superadded felicity of a few superior geniuses, who first improve themselves, and then felicitate their inferior brethren, by simplifying their own ideas, by refining and elevating those of their fellow creatures, by establishing a social intercourse, consolidating fraternal love, and along with it all the reciprocal ties, that unite mankind.

Men's ideas of objects essential to their happiness are neither so dissimilar, nor so numerous, as inattentive spectators are apt to suppose.

Variety of sentiment, which is the life of society, cannot be destructive of real religion.

Mere mental errors, if they be not entirely innocent in the account of the supreme Governour of mankind, cannot be, however, objects of blame and punishment among men.

Christianity could never be intended to destroy the just natural rights, or even to diminish the natural privileges of mankind. That religion, which allows the just claims, and secures the social happiness of all mankind, must needs be a better religion than that, which provides for only a part at the expense of the rest. God is more glorified by the good actions of his creatures, expressive of homage to him, and productive of universal social good, than he is by uncertain conjectures, or even accurate notions, which originate in self-possession, and terminate in social disunion.

How clear soever all these maxims may be, a certain degree of ambition or avarice, ignorance or malice, presumption or diffidence, or any other irregular passion, will render a man blind to the clearest demonstration, and insensible to the most rational and affecting persuasion. These positions, mere opinions and prepossessions before examination, become demonstrative truths after a course of diligent search.

But, previous to all inquiries concerning the doctrines of christianity, it is absolutely necessary to establish that of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY ; for, say we

what we will, if this preliminary doctrine of right be disallowed, voluntary piety is the dream of an enthusiast ; the oracles of God in the christian world, like those of the Sibyls in pagan Rome, are sounds convertible to senatorial sense ; and the whole christian mission, from the first prophet down to the last minister, is one long muster-roll of statesmen's tools, a disgrace to their species, a contradiction to their profession, a dishonour to their God.

Christian liberty in Italy is liberty to be a Roman catholic, that is, liberty to believe what the bishop of Rome affirms to be true, and liberty to perform what he commands to be done. Christian liberty in some reformed churches is liberty to renounce what the reformers renounced, to believe what they affirmed, and to practise what they required. But we, who *have not so learned Christ*, define christian liberty otherwise ; and, if we be asked, What is christian liberty ? we answer, it is liberty to be a christian. One part of christianity consists of propositions to be believed. Liberty to be a christian believer is liberty to examine these propositions, to form a judgment of them, and to come to a self-determination, according to our own best abilities. Another part of christianity consists of duties to be performed. Liberty to be a practical christian is liberty to perform these duties, either as they regard God, our neighbour, or ourselves. Liberty to be a christian implies liberty not to be a christian, as liberty to examine a

proposition implies liberty to reject the arguments brought to support it, if they appear inconclusive, as well as liberty to admit them, if they appear demonstrative. To pretend to examine christianity, before we have established our right to do so, is to pretend to cultivate an estate, before we have made out our title to it.

The object of christian liberty, that, with which a man, who would examine christianity, has to do, is a system of christian doctrine ; but, having established the doctrine of right, before we proceed to exercise this right by examining the religion proposed to mankind by Jesus Christ, it is absolutely necessary to inquire what we ought, on sound principles of just and fair reasoning, to expect to find in it. I know some truths without revelation. I have a full demonstration in nature that there is one God, that it is impossible there should be more than one, that he is an intelligent Spirit, and that he is a wise and bountiful Being. Should any religion, which pretends to be divine, affirm, there is a plurality of gods—God is not an intelligent spirit—God is an unwise and an unkind being—I should have a right to reject this pretended revelation. Indeed, should a revealed religion allow my demonstrations, and afterwards explain them in a manner quite subversive of my former explications of them ; should it affirm, God is, as you say, a wise and bountiful Being, but he displays his wisdom and goodness not in governing his

intelligent creatures as you have imagined ; such a moral government, I will prove to you, would show a defect of wisdom and goodness ; but he displays the supreme perfection of both by providing for such and such interests, and by bestowing such and such benefits, as have either escaped your notice, or were beyond your comprehension ;—in this case, I ought not to reject revelation ; for, although I can demonstrate without inspiration the wisdom and goodness of God, yet I cannot pretend by the light of nature to know all the directions, and to ascertain all the limits of these perfections.

Lay christianity before me who will, I expect to find three things in it, which I call *analogy*, *proportion*, and *perfection*. Each of these articles opens a wide field of not incurious speculation, and each fully explained and applied would serve to guide any man in his choice of a religion, yea, in his choice of a party among the various divisions of christians. But alas ! we are not employed now-a-days in examining and choosing religious principles for ourselves, but in subscribing, and defending those of our ancestors. A few hints then shall serve.

By ANALOGY I mean resemblance ; and when I say a revealed religion must bring along with it analogical evidence, I mean, it must resemble the just dictates of nature. The reason is plain. The same Supreme Being is the author of both. The God of nature has formed man for observing objects, comparing them

together, laying down principles, inferring consequences, reasoning and self-determining. He has not only empowered all mankind to exercise these abilities, but he has even constrained them by a necessity of nature to do so ; he has not only rendered it impossible for men to excel without this exercise, but he has even rendered it impossible for them to exist safely in society without it. In a word, the God of nature has made man in his own image, a self-determining being, and, to say nothing of the nature of virtue, he has rendered free consent essential to every man's felicity and peace. With his own consent, subjection makes him happy ; without it, dominion over the universe would make him miserable.

The religion of nature, (I mean by this expression here, the objects which display the nature of the Deity, and thereby discover the obligations of mankind,) is in perfect harmony with the natural constitution of man. All natural objects offer evidence to all ; but force is on none. A man may examine it, and he may not examine it ; he may admit it, and he may reject it ; and, if his rejection of the evidence of natural religion be not expressed in such overt acts as are injurious to the peace of civil society, no man is empowered to force him, or to punish him ; the supreme moral Governour of the world himself does not distinguish him here by any exterior punishments ; at most he expresses his displeasure by marks attached to the person of the culprit, and concealed from all

the rest of his fellow creatures ; and the glory of civil society is not to encroach on the moral government of God.

Christianity comes, pretends to come from the God of nature ; I look for analogy, and I find it ; but I find it in the holy Scriptures, the first teachers, and the primitive churches.

In all these I am considered as a rational creature ; objects are proposed, evidence is offered ; if I admit it, I am not entitled thereby to any temporal emoluments ; if I refuse it, I am not subjected to any temporal punishments ; the whole is an affair of conscience, and lies between each individual and his God. I choose to be a christian on this very account. This freedom, which I call a perfection of my nature ; this self-determination, the dignity of my species, the essence of my natural virtue, this I do not forfeit by becoming a christian ; this I retain, explained, confirmed, directed, assisted by the regal grant of the Son of God. Thus the prerogatives of Christ, the laws of his religion, and the natural rights of mankind being analogous, evidence arises of the divinity of the religion of Jesus.

I believe, it would be very easy to prove, that the christianity of the church of Rome, and that of every other establishment, because they are *establishments*, are totally destitute of this analogy. The religion of nature is not capable of establishment ; the religion of *Jesus Christ* is not capable of establishment ; if the

religion of any church be capable of establishment, it is not analogous to that of Scripture, or that of nature. A very simple example may explain our meaning. Natural religion requires man to pay a mental homage to the Deity, to venerate his perfections, by adoring and confiding in them. By what possible means can these pious operations of the mind be *established*? Could they be forced, their nature would be destroyed, and they would cease to be piety, which is an exercise of judgment and will. Revealed religion requires man to pay a mental homage to the Deity through Jesus Christ; to venerate his perfections by adoring and confiding in them as christianity directs; by repentance, by faith, by hope, and so on. How is it possible to *establish* those spiritual acts? A human establishment requires man to pay this christian mental homage to the Deity by performing some external ceremony, suppose bowing to the east. The ceremony, we grant, may be established; but, the voluntary exercise of the soul in the performance, which is essential to the christianity of the action,—who in the world can establish this? If the religion of Jesus be considered as consisting of external rites and internal dispositions, the former may be established; but, be it remembered, the establishment of the exterior not only does not establish the interior, but the destruction of the last is previously essential to the establishment of the first.

No religion can be established without penal sanc-

tions, and all penal sanctions in cases of religion are persecutions. Before a man can persecute, he must renounce the generous, tolerant dispositions of a christian. No religion can be established without human creeds ; and subscription to all human creeds implies two dispositions contrary to true religion, and both expressly forbidden by the author of it. These two dispositions are, love of dominion over conscience in the imposer, and an abject preference of slavery in the subscriber. The first usurps the rights of Christ ; the last swears allegiance to a pretender. The first domineers, and gives laws like a tyrant ; the last truckles like a vassal. The first assumes a dominion incompatible with his frailty, impossible even to his dignity, yea, denied to the dignity of angels ; the last yields a low submission, inconsistent with his own dignity, and ruinous to that very religion, which he pretends by this means to support. Jesus Christ does not require, he does not allow, yea, he expressly forbids both these dispositions, well knowing, that an allowance of these would be a suppression of the finest dispositions of the human soul, and a degrading of revelation beneath the religion of nature. If human inventions have formerly secularized christianity, and rendered such bad dispositions necessary in times of ignorance, they ought to be exploded now, as all christians now allow this theory. The Son of God did not come to redeem one part of mankind to serve the secular views and unworthy passions of the other ;

but he obtained freedom for both, that both *might serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives*. When churches reduce this theory to practice, they realize in actual life, what otherwise makes only a fine idea decyphered in books ; and by so doing they adorn their christianity with the glorious evidence of analogy.

Suppose the God of nature should think proper to reveal a simple system of astronomy, and to require all mankind to examine and believe this revelation on pain of his displeasure. Suppose one civil government, having examined this revelation, and explained the sense in which they understood it, should endeavour to establish their explication by temporal rewards and punishments. Suppose they should require all their subjects to carry their infants in their arms to a public school, to answer certain astronomical interrogations, to be put by a professor of astronomy ; as in general,—Wilt thou, infant of eight days old, wilt thou be an astronomer ? Dost thou renounce all erroneous systems of astronomy ? In particular, dost thou admit the true Copernican system ? Dost thou believe the revealed explication of this system ? And dost thou also believe that explication of this revelation, which certain of our own predecessors in the profession believed, which explication the government has adopted, and which we, your masters and parents, in due obedience, receive ? Suppose a proxy required to answer for this infant ; All this, I,

proxy for this child, do steadfastly believe ; and suppose, from this hour the child became a reputed astronomer. Suppose yet further, this child should grow to manhood, and in junior life should be pressed, on account of the obligation contracted in his infant state, to subscribe a certain paper, called an astronomical creed, containing mathematical definitions, astronomical propositions, and so on ; and should be required for certain rewards to examine and approve, to teach and defend this creed, and no other, without incurring the penalty of expulsion from all public schools, a deprivation of all honours, which he might be supposed on other accounts to merit, an exclusion from all offices of trust, credit, and profit, in some cases a loss of property, in others imprisonment, in others death.

In this supposed case, I ask, would not the establishment of this system be an open violation of the doctrine of analogy, and should I not have a right to reason thus ?—The revelation itself is infallible, and the author of it has given it me to examine ; but the establishment of *a given meaning* of it renders examination needless, and perhaps dangerous. The God of nature has given me eyes, instruments, powers, and inclinations to use them ; eyes, faculties, and dispositions as good as those of my ancestors, and instruments better ; but all these advantages, which may be beneficial to me, if they confirm the truth of the explication, may be fatal to me, if they lag be-

hind, or ken beyond the bound of the creed. Nature says, a constellation is a collection of stars, which in the heavens appear near to one another. This is a plain, simple truth ; I open my eyes, and admit the evidence. Revelation says, each fixed star is a sun, the centre of a system, consisting of planets inhabited by intelligent beings, who possess one sense and two faculties more than the inhabitants of this globe, and who worship the most high God in spirit and in truth. I cannot comprehend this whole proposition ; but there is nothing in it contrary to the nature of things ; and I believe the truth of it on the testimony of the revealer. The established explication of this proposition is that of Ptolemy. He numbered the stars in the constellation Boötes, and found them, or supposed he found them, twenty-three ; and this number I am to examine and approve, teach and defend, against all opponents. What shall I say to Tycho, who affirms, Boötes contains only eighteen ? Must I execrate Hevelius, who makes them fifty-two ? After all, perhaps Flamstead may be right ; he says there are fifty-four. Does not this method of teaching astronomy suppose an hundred absurdities ? Does it not imply the imperfection of the revealed system, the infallibility of Ptolemy, the erroneousness of the other astronomers, the folly of examination, or the still greater madness of allowing a conclusion after a denial of the premises from which it pretends to be drawn ? When I was an infant, I am told, I was

treated like a man ; now I am a man, I am treated like an infant. I am an astronomer by proxy. The plan of God requires faculties, and the exercise of them ; that of my country exchanges both for quiet submission. I am, and I am not, a believer of astronomy.

Were it affirmed, that a revelation from heaven *established* such a method of maintaining a science of speculation, reasoning, and practice, every rational creature would have a right to doubt the truth of such a revelation ; for it would violate the doctrine of analogy, by making the Deity inconsistent with himself. But we will pursue this track no further ; we hope nothing said will be deemed illiberal ; we distinguish between a constitution of things, and many wise and good men, who submit to it ; and we only venture to guess, if they be wise and good men under such inconveniences, they would be wiser and better men without them. At all adventures, if we owe much respect to men, we owe more to truth, to incontrovertible, unchangeable truth.

A second character of a divine revelation is **PROPORTION**. By proportion I mean relative fitness ; and, when I affirm, a divine revelation must bring along with it proportional evidence, I mean to say, it must appear to be exactly fitted to those intelligent creatures, for whose benefit it is intended. In the former article we required a *similarity* between the requisitions of God and the faculties of men ; in this

we require an exact *quantity* of requisition commensurate with those faculties. The former regards the nature of a revelation ; this has for its object the limits of it. Were it possible for God, having formed a man only for walking, by a messenger from heaven to require him to fly, the doctrine of analogy would be violated by this requisition ; and were he to determine a prodigious space, through which he required him to pass in a given time ; were he to describe an immense distance, and to enjoin him to move through it with a degree of velocity impossible to him, the doctrine of proportion, would be violated ; and the God of revelation would in both cases be made contradictory to the God of nature.

The christian revelation, we presume, answers all our just expectations on these articles ; for all the truths revealed by it are analogous to the nature of things, and every article in it bears an exact proportion to the abilities of all those, for whose benefit it is given. Our Saviour treats of the doctrine of proportion in the parable of the talents, and supposes the Lord to apportion the number of talents, when he bestows them, and the rewards and punishments, which he distributes for the use and abuse of them, to the *several ability* of each servant. St Paul depicts the primitive church in all the beauty of this proportional economy ; *the same God worketh all diversities of operations in all differences of administrations, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

This economy, he says, assimilates the christian church to the human body, and gives to the one, as to the other, strength, symmetry, and beauty, evidently proving that the author of creation is the author of redemption, framing both by one uniform rule of analogy and proportion.

Full of these just notions, we examine that description of revelation, which human creeds exhibit, and we perceive at once, they are all destitute of proportional evidence. They all consist of multifarious propositions, each of which is considered as essential to the whole, and the belief of all essential to an enjoyment of the benefits of christianity, yea, to those of civil society, in this life, and to a participation of eternal life in the world to come. In this case the free gifts of God to all are monopolized by a few, and sold out to the many at a price, far greater than nine tenths of them can pay, and at a price, which the remaining part ought not to pay, because the donor has not empowered these salesmen to exact any price, because by his original grant all are made joint proprietors, and because the payment would be at once a renunciation of their right to hold by the original grant, and of their Lord's prerogative to bestow.

What can a disclaimer mean, when he repeats a number of propositions, and declares the belief of them all essential to the salvation of *man*? Or what could he reply to one, who should ask him, which *man* do you mean, the man in the stall? It is Sir

Isaac Newton. Or the man in the aisle? It is Tom Long, the carrier. God Almighty, the Creator of both, has formed these two men with different organs of body, and different faculties of mind; he has given them different advantages and different opportunities of improving them; he has placed them in different relations, and empowered the one to teach what the other, depend on his belief what will, is not capable of learning. Ten thousand Tom Longs go to make up one Newtonian soul. Is it credible, the God who made these two men, who thoroughly knows them, who is the common parent, the just governor, and the kind benefactor of both, should require of men so different, equal belief and practice? Were such a thing supposable, how unequal and disproportional, how inadequate and unlike himself, must such a Deity be! To grasp the terraqueous globe with a human hand, to make a tulip cup contain the ocean, to gather all the light of the universe into one human eye, to hide the sun in a snuffbox, are the mighty projects of children's fancies. Is it possible, requisitions similar to these should proceed from *the only wise God*?

There is, we have reason to believe, a certain portion of spirit, if I may be allowed to speak so, that constitutes a human soul; there are infinitely different degrees of capability imparted by the Creator to the souls of mankind; and there is a certain ratio, by necessity of nature, between each degree of

intelligence and a given number of ideas, as there is between a cup capable of containing a given quantity, and a quantity of matter capable of being contained in it. In certain cases it might serve my interest, could the palm of my hand contain a hogshead ; but in general my interest is better served by an inability to contain so much. We apply these certain principles to revelation, and we say, God hath given in the christian religion an infinite multitude of ideas ; as in nature he hath created an infinite multitude of objects. These objects are diversified without end, they are of various sizes, colours, and shapes, and they are capable of innumerable motions, productive of multifarious effects, and all placed in various degrees of perspicuity. Objects of thought in the christian religion are exactly similar ; there is no end of their variety ; God and all his perfections, man and all his operations, the being and employment of superior holy spirits, the existence and dispositions of fallen spirits, the creation and government of the whole world of matter and that of spirit, the influences of God and the obligations of men, the dissolution of the universe, a resurrection, a judgment, a heaven, and a hell, all these, placed in various degrees of perspicuity, are exhibited in religion to the contemplation of intelligent creatures.

The creatures who are required to contemplate these objects, have various degrees of contemplative ability ; and their duty, and consequently their virtue,

which is nothing else but a performance of duty, consists in applying all their ability to understand as many of these objects, that is, to form as many ideas of them, as are apportioned to their own degree. So many objects they are capable of seeing, so many objects it is their duty to see. So much of each object they are capable of comprehending, so much of each object it is their duty to comprehend. So many emotions they are capable of exercising, so many emotions it is their duty to exercise. So many acts of devotion they can perform, so many Almighty God will reward them for performing, or punish them for neglecting. This I call the doctrine of religious proportion. This I have a right to expect to find in a divine revelation; and this I find in the most splendid manner in christianity, as it lies in the Bible, as it was in the first churches, and as it is in some modern communities. I wish I could change the word *some* for *all*.

This doctrine of proportion would destroy every human creed in the world, at least it would annihilate the imposition of any. Instead of making one creed for a whole nation, which by the way provides for only one nation, and consigns over the rest of the world to the destroyer of mankind; instead of doing so, there should be as many creeds as creatures; and instead of affirming, the belief of three hundred propositions is essential to the felicity of every man in both worlds, we ought to affirm, the belief of half

a proposition is essential to the salvation of Mary, and the belief of a whole one to that of John, the belief of six propositions, or, more properly, the examination of six propositions, is essential to the salvation of the reverend Edward, and the examination of sixty to that of the right reverend Richard ; for, if I can prove, one has sixty degrees of capacity, another six, and another one, I can easily prove, it would be unjust to require the same exercises of all ; and a champion ascribing such injustice to God would be no formidable adversary for the pompousness of his challenge, or the caparisons of his horse ; his very sword could not conquer, though it might affright from the field.

The world and revelation, both the work of the same God, are both constructed on the same principles ; and were the book of Scripture, like that of nature, laid open to universal inspection, were all ideas of temporal rewards and punishments removed from the study of it, that would come to pass in the moral world, which has actually happened in the world of human science ; each capacity would find its own object, and take its own quantum. Newtons will find stars without penalties, Miltons will be poets, and Lardners christians without rewards. Calvins will contemplate the decrees of God, and Baxters will try to assort them with the spontaneous volitions of men ; all, like the celestial bodies, will roll on in the quiet majesty of simple proportion, each in his

porper sphere shining to the glory of God the Creator. But alas ; *We have not so learned Christ.*

Were this doctrine of proportion allowed, three consequences would follow. First ; Subscription to human creeds, with all their appendages, both penal and pompous, would roll back into the turbulent ocean, the *See* I mean, from whence they came ; the Bible would remain a placid emanation of wisdom from God ; and the belief of it a sufficient test of the obedience of his people. Secondly ; Christians would be freed from the inhuman necessity of execrating one another ; and by placing christianity in believing in Christ, and not in believing in one another, they would rid revelation of those intolerable abuses, which are fountains of sorrow to christians, and sources of arguments to infidels. Thirdly ; Opportunity would be given to believers in Christ to exercise those dispositions, which the present disproportional division of this common benefit obliges them to suppress, or conceal. O cruel theology, that makes it a crime to do what I have neither a right nor a power to leave undone !

I call **PERFECTION** a third necessary character of a divine revelation. Every production of an intelligent being bears the characters of the intelligence, that produceth it, *for as the man is, so is his strength.* A weak genius produces a work imperfect and weak like itself. A wise, good being produces a work wise and good ; and, if his power be equal to his wisdom

and goodness, his work will resemble himself; and such a degree of wisdom, animated by an equal degree of goodness, and assisted by an equal degree of power, will produce a work equally wise, equally beneficial, equally effectual. The same degrees of goodness and power accompanied with only half the degree of wisdom will produce a work as remarkable for a deficiency of skill as for a redundancy of efficiency and benevolence. Thus the flexibility of the hand may be known by the writing; the power of penetrating, and combining in the mind of the physician, may be known by the feelings of the patient, who has taken his prescription; and, by parity of reason, the uniform perfections of an invisible God may be known by the uniform perfection of his productions.

I perceive, I must not launch into the wide ocean of the doctrine of perfection, and I will confine myself to three characters of imperfection, which may serve to explain my meaning. Proposing to obtain a great end without the use of proper means—the employing of great means to obtain no valuable end—and the destroying of the end by the use of the means employed to obtain it, are three characters of imperfection rarely found in frail intelligent agents; and certainly they can never be attributed to the great Supreme. A violation of the doctrine of analogy would argue God an unjust being; a violation of that of proportion would prove him an unkind be-

ing; and a violation of this of perfection would argue him a being void of wisdom. Were we to suppose him capable of proposing plans impossible to be executed, and then punishing his creatures for not executing them, we should attribute to the best of beings the most odious dispositions of the most infamous of mankind. Heaven forbid the thought !

The first character of imperfection is *proposing to obtain a great end without the use of proper means*. To propose a noble end, argues a fund of goodness; but not to propose proper means to obtain it, argues a defect of wisdom. Christianity proposes the noble end of assimilating man to God, and it employs proper means of obtaining this end. God is an intelligent being, happy in a perfection of wisdom; the Gospel assimilates the felicity of human intelligences to that of the Deity by communicating the ideas of God on certain articles to men. God is a bountiful being, happy in a perfection of goodness; the Gospel assimilates the felicity of man to that of God by communicating certain benevolent dispositions to its disciples, similar to the communicative excellencies of God. God is an operative being, happy in the display of exterior works, beneficent to his creatures; the Gospel felicitates man by directing and enabling him to perform certain works beneficent to his fellow creatures. God condescends to propose this noble end, of assimilating man to himself, to the nature of mankind, and not to certain distinctions, foreign from

the nature of man, and appendant on exterior circumstances. The boy, who feeds the farmer's meanest animals ; the sailor, who spends his days on the ocean ; the miner, who, secluded from the light of the day and the society of his fellow creatures, spends his life in a subterraneous cavern, as well as the renowned heroes of mankind, are all included in this condescending, benevolent design of God. The Gospel proposes to assimilate all to God ; but it proposes such an assimilation, or, may I say, such a degree of moral excellence, as the nature of each can bear ; and it directs to means so proper to obtain this end, and renders these directions so extremely plain, that the perfection of the designer shines with the utmost glory.

I have sometimes imagined a Pagan ship's crew in a vessel under sail in the wide ocean ; I have supposed not one soul aboard ever to have heard one word of christianity ; I have imagined a bird dropping a New Testament, written in the language of the mariners on the upper deck ; I have imagined a fund of uneducated, unsophisticated good sense in this company, and I have required of this little world answers to two questions ; first, What end does this book propose ? The answer is, *This book was written, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name.* I ask, secondly, What means doth this book authorize a foremast man, who believes, to em-

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ploy to the rest of the crew to induce them to believe, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing, they also, with the foremast man, may have eternal felicity through his name? I dare not answer this question; but I dare venture to guess, should this foremast man conceal the book from any of the crew, he would be unlike the God, who gave it to all; or should he oblige the cabin-boy to admit his explication of the book, he would be unlike the God, who requires the boy to explain it to himself; and should he require the captain to enforce his explication by penalties, the captain ought to reprove him folly for counteracting the end of the book, the felicity of all the mariners; for turning a message of peace into an engine of faction; for employing means inadequate to the end; and so for erasing that character of perfection, which the heavenly donor gave it.

A second character of imperfection is—*the employing of great means to obtain no valuable end.* Whatever end the author of christianity had in view, it is beyond a doubt, he hath employed great means to effect it. To use the language of a prophet, he hath *shaken the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.* When *the desire of all nations* came, universal nature felt his approach, and preternatural displays of wisdom, power, and goodness, have ever attended his steps. The most valuable ends were answered by his coming. Conviction followed his preaching; and truths, till then shut up in

the counsels of God, were actually put into the possession of finite minds. A general manumission followed his meritorious death, and the earth resounded with the praises of a spiritual deliverer, who had set the sons of bondage free. The laws of his empire were published, and all his subjects were happy in obeying them. *In his days the righteous flourished,* and on his plan, *abundance of peace* would have continued *as long as the moon endured*. Plenty of instruction, liberty to examine it, and peace in obeying it. These were ends worthy of the great means used to obtain them.

Let us for a moment suppose a subversion of the lxxii psalm, from whence I have borrowed these ideas; let us imagine *the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bringing presents*, not to express their homage to Christ, but to purchase that dominion over the consciences of mankind, which belongs to Jesus Christ; let us suppose the boundless wisdom of the Gospel, and the innumerable ideas of inspired men concerning it, shrivelled up into the narrow compass of one human creed; let us suppose liberty of thought taken away; and the peace of the world interrupted by the introduction and support of bold usurpations, dry ceremonies, cant phrases, and puerile inventions. In this supposed case, the history of great means remains, the worthy ends to be answered by them are taken away, and they who should thus deprive mankind of the end of the sacred code, would charge

themselves with the necessary obligation of accounting for this character of imperfection. Ye prophets and apostles ! ye ambassadors of Christ ! *How do ye say, we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us ? Lo ! certainly in vain made he it, the pen of the scribes is in vain !* Precarious wisdom, that must not be questioned ! useless books, which must not be examined ! vain legislation, that either cannot be obeyed, or ruins him who obeys it !

All the ends that can be obtained by human modifications of divine revelation, can never compensate for the loss of that dignity, which the perfection of the system, as God gave it, acquires to him ; nor can it indemnify man for the loss of that spontaneity, which is the essence of every effort that merits the name of human, and without which virtue itself is nothing but a name. Must we destroy the *man* to make the *christian* ? What is there in a scholastic honour, what in an ecclesiastical emolument, what in an archiepiscopal throne, to indemnify for these losses ? Jesus Christ gave his life a ransom for men, not to empower them to enjoy these momentary distinctions ; these are far inferior to the noble ends of his coming ;—the honour of God, and the Gospel at large ; the disinterested exercise of mental abilities, assimilating the freeborn soul to its benevolent God ; a copartnership with Christ in promoting the universal felicity of all mankind ; these, these are ends of religion worthy of the blood of Jesus, and deserving the sacrifice of whatever is called great among men.

Thirdly ; *The destruction of the end by the use of the means employed to obtain it*, is another character of imperfection. St Paul calls christianity, *unity*. He denominates it *the unity of the Spirit*, on account of its author, object, and end. God, the Supreme Spirit, is the author of it ; the spirits, or souls of men are the object ; and the spirituality of human souls, that is, the perfection of which finite spirits are capable, is the end of it. The Gospel proposes the reunion of men divided by sin, first to God, and then to one another ; and, in order to effect it, reveals a religion, which teaches *one God, one mediator between God and men, the man .Christ Jesus ; one rule of faith, one object of hope ;* and, lest we should imagine this revelation to admit of no variety, we are told, *grace is given to every one according to the proportional measure of the gift of christianity*. Each believer is therefore exhorted to *speak the truth in love, to walk with all lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering*, and to *forbear another in love*. Here is a character of perfection ; for these means employed to unite mankind are productive of union, the end of the means.

Should men take up the Gospel in this simplicity, and, accommodating it to their own imaginary, superior wisdom, or to their own secular purposes, should they explain this union so as to suit their designs, and employ means to produce it ; and should they denominate their system, christianity, it would certainly

be, in spite of its name, a christianity marked with the imperfection of its authors ; for in the christian religion, in the thing itself, and not in its appellation, shines the glorious character of perfection.

The christian religion unites mankind. By what common *bond* does it propose to do so ? By *love*. This is a *bond of perfectness*, a most perfect bond. This is practicable, and productive of every desirable end ; and the more we study human nature, the more fully shall we be convinced, that we cannot imagine any religion to do more ; nor need we desire more, for this answers every end of being religious. Had Jesus Christ formed his church on a *sentimental* plan, he must have employed many means which he has not employed, and he must have omitted many directions which he has given. One of his means of uniting mankind is contained in this direction, *Search the Scriptures*, and *call no man your master upon earth* ; that is to say, exercise your very different abilities, assisted by very different degrees of aid, in periods of very different duration, and form your own notions of the doctrines contained in the Scriptures. Is not this injunction destructive to a sentimental union ? Place ten thousand spectators in several circles around a statue erected on a spacious plain, bid some look at it through magnifying glasses, others through common spectacles, some with keen naked eyes, others with weak diseased eyes, each on a point of each circle different from that where another stands, and

all receiving the picture of the object in the eye by different reflections and refractions of the rays of light ; and say, will not a command to look destroy the idea of sentimental union ; and, if the establishment of an exact union of sentiment be the end, will not looking, the mean appointed to obtain it, actually destroy it, and would not such a projector of uniformity mark his system with imperfection ?

Had Jesus Christ formed his church on the plan of a *ceremonial* union, or on that of a *professional* union, it is easy to see, the same reasoning might be applied ; the laws of such a legislature would counteract and destroy one another, and a system so unconnected would discover the imperfection of its author, and provide for the ruin of itself.

These principles being allowed, we proceed to examine the doctrines of christianity, as they are presented to an inquisitive man, entirely at liberty to choose his religion, by our different churches in their several creeds. The church of Rome lays before me the decisions of the council of Trent. The Lutheran church the confession of Augsburg. One nation gives me one account of christianity, another a different account of it, a third contradicts the other two, and no two creeds agree. The difference of these systems obliges me to allow, they could not all proceed from any one person, much less could they all proceed from such a person, as all christians affirm *Jesus Christ* to be. I am driven, then, to examine

his account of his own religion contained in the allowed standard book, to which they all appeal; and here I find, or think I find, a right of reduction, that removes all those suspicions, which variety in human creeds had excited in my mind concerning the truth of christianity.

The doctrines of christianity, I presume to guess, according to the usual sense of the phrase, are divisible into two classes. The first contains the principal truths, the pure genuine theology of Jesus Christ, essential to the system, and in which all christians in our various communities agree. The other class consists of those less important propositions, which are meant to serve as explications of the principal truths. The first is the matter of our holy religion, the last is our conception of the manner of its operation. In the first we all agree; in the last our benevolent religion, constructed on principles of analogy, proportion, and perfection, both enjoins and empowers us to agree to differ. The first is the light of the world, the last our sentiments on its nature, or our distribution of its effects.

In general each church calls its own creed a system of christianity, a body of christian doctrine, and perhaps not improperly; but then each divine ought to distinguish that part of his system, which is pure revelation, and so stands confessedly the doctrine of Jesus Christ, from that other part, which is human explication, and so may be either true or false, clear

or obscure, presumptive or demonstrative, according to the abilities of the explainer who compiled the creed. Without this distinction, we may incorporate all our opinions with the infallible revelations of heaven, we may imagine each article of our belief essential to christianity itself, we may subjoin a human codicil to a divine testament, and attribute equal authenticity to both ; we may account a proposition confirmed by a synodical seal as fully authenticated, as a truth confirmed by an apostolic miracle ; and so we may bring ourselves to rank a conscientious disciple of Christ, who denies the necessity of episcopal ordination, with a brazen disciple of the devil, who denies the truth of revelation, and pretends to doubt the being of a God.

But here, I feel again the force of that observation, with which this article begins. How few, comparatively, will allow, that such a reduction of a large system to a very small number of clear, indisputable, essential first principles, will serve the cause of christianity ! How many will pretend to think such a reduction dangerous to thirty-five out of thirty-nine articles of faith ! How many will confound a denial of the essentiality (so to speak) of a proposition, with a denial of the truth of it ! How many will go farther still, and execrate the latitudinarian, who presumes in this manner to subvert christianity itself ! I rejoice in prospect of that *day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to his Gospel ; when we shall stand, not at the tribunal of*

human prejudices and passions, but at the just bar of a clement God.

Here, were I only concerned, I would rest, and my answer to all complainants should be a respectful silence before their oracles of reason and religion ; but, alas ! I have nine children, and my ambition is (if it be not an unpardonable presumption to compare insects with angels) my ambition is to engage them to treat a spirit of intolerance, as Hamilcar taught Hannibal to treat the old Roman spirit of universal dominion. The enthusiastic Carthaginian parent, going to offer a sacrifice to Jupiter for the success of an intended war, took with him his little son Hannibal, then only nine years of age, and eager to accompany his father, led him to the altar, made him lay his little hand on the sacrifice, and swear that he would never be in friendship with the Romans. We may sanctify this thought by transferring it to other objects, and, while we sing in the church, glory to God in the highest, vow perpetual peace with all mankind, and reject all weapons except those which are spiritual, we may, we must declare war against a spirit of intolerance from generation to generation. Thus Moses wrote a memorial in a book, rehearsed it in the ears of Joshua, built an altar, called the name of it *Jehovah my banner*, and said, *the Lord hath sworn, that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*

We are neither going to contrast human creeds with one another, nor with the Bible ; we are not going to affirm or deny any propositions contained in them ; we only design to prove, that all consist of human explications as well as divine revelations ; and consequently, that all are not of equal importance, nor ought any to be imposed on the disciples of Christ, either by those who are not disciples of the Son of God, or by those who are. The subject is delicate and difficult, not through any intricacy in itself, but through a certain infelicity of the times. An error on the one side would be fatal to revelation, by alluring us to sacrifice the pure doctrines of religion to a blind benevolence ; and on the other, an error may be fatal to religion itself, by inducing us to make it a patron of intolerance. We repeat it again, a system of christian doctrine is the object of christian liberty ; the articles, which compose a human system of christian doctrine, are divisible into the two classes of *doctrines* and *explications* ; the first we attribute to *Christ*, and call *Christian* doctrines, the last to some of his *disciples*, and these we call *human* explications ; the first *are* true, the last *may be* so ; the first ex-ecrate intolerance, the last cannot be supported without the spirit of it. I will endeavour to explain my meaning by an example.

Every believer of revelation allows the authenticity of this passage of holy Scripture ; *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that*

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. If we cast this into propositional form, it will afford as many propositions as it contains ideas. Each idea clearly contained in the text, I call an idea of Jesus Christ, a christian sentiment, a truth of revelation, in a word, a *christian doctrine*. Each of these ideas of the text, in forming itself into a proposition, will naturally associate with itself a few other ideas of the expletive kind ; these I call secondary ideas in distinction from the first, which I call primary ; or, in plainer style, ideas clearly of the *text*, I name christian doctrines, or doctrines of Christ, and *all the rest* I call human explications of these doctrines ; they may be christian, they may not ; for I am not sure, that the next idea, which always follows a first in my mind, was the next idea to the first in the mind of Jesus Christ ; the first is certainly his, he declares it ; the second might be his, but as he is silent, I can say nothing certain ; where he stops, my infallibility ends, and my uncertain reason begins.

The following propositions are evidently in the text, and consequently they are christian doctrines, emanating from the author of christianity, and pausing to be examined before the intelligent powers of his creatures.—There is an *everlasting life*, a future state of eternal happiness—the mediation of *the only begotten Son of God* is necessary to men's enjoyment of eternal happiness—*believing* in Christ is essential to a participation of eternal felicity—every believer in

Christ *shall have everlasting life*—unbelievers shall *perish*—all the blessings of christianity originate in *God*, display his *love*, and are *given* to the *world*. These, methinks, we may venture to call primary ideas of christianity, genuine truths of revelation; but each doctrine will give occasion to many questions, and although different expositors will agree in the matter of each proposition, they will conjecture very differently concerning the manner of its operation.

One disciple of Christ, whom we call Richard, having read this text, having exercised his thoughts on the meaning of it, and having arranged them in the propositional form now mentioned, if he would convince another disciple, whom we name Robert, of the truth of any one of his propositions, would be obliged to unfold his own train of thinking, which consists of an associated concatenation of ideas, some of which are primary ideas of Jesus Christ, and others secondary notions of his own; additions, perhaps of his wisdom, perhaps of his folly, perhaps of both; but all, however, intended to *explicate* his notion of the text, and to facilitate the evidence of his notion to his brother. Robert admits the proposition; but not exactly in Richard's sense. In this case, we assort ideas, we take what both allow to be the original ideas of our common Lord, and we reckon thus;—Here are nine ideas in this proposition, numbers one, three, six, nine, genuine, primary ideas of Christ; numbers

two, four, five, secondary ideas of Richard ; numbers seven, eight, secondary ideas of Robert ; the first constitute a divine doctrine, the last a human explication ; the first forms one divine object, the last two human notions of its mode of existence, manner of operation, or something similar ; but, be each what it may, it is human explication, and neither synod nor senate can make it more.

No divine will dispute the truth of this proposition, *God gave Jesus Christ to believers* ; for it is demonstrably in the text. To this, therefore, Beza and Zanchy, Malancthon and Luther, Calvin and Arminius, Baxter and Crisp agree, all allowing it a christian doctrine ; but each associating with the idea of gift, other ideas of time, place, relation, condition, and so on, explains the doctrine, so as to contain all his own additional ideas.

One class of expositors take the idea of *time*, and by it explain the proposition. God and believers, says one, are to be considered contemplatively *before the creation* in the light of Creator and creatures, abstracted from all moral considerations whatever ; then God united Christ to his church in the pure mass of creatureship, without the contemplation of Adam's fall. Another affirms, God gave a Saviour to men in *design*, *before* the existence of creatures ; but in full contemplation, however, of the misery induced by the fall. A third says, God gave Christ to believers, not in purpose before the fall ; but in prom-

ise immediately *after* it. A fourth adds, God gives Christ to believers *on their believing*, by putting them in possession of the benefits of christianity. In all these systems, the ideas of God, Christ, believers, and gift, remain, the pure, genuine ideas of the text ; and the association of *time* distinguisheth and varieth the systems.

A second class of expositors take the idea of *relation*, and one affirms, God and believers are to be considered in the relative light of *governour and subjects* ; the characters of a perfect government are discernible in the giving of a Saviour, justice vindicates the honour of government by punishing some, mercy displays the benefit of government by pardoning others, and royal prerogative both disculpates and elevates the guilty. However, as the governour is a God, he retains and displays his absolute right of dispensing his favours as he pleases. A second says, God and believers are to be considered in the light of *parent and children*, and Christ is not given to believers according to mere maxims of exact government ; but he is bestowed by God, the common Father, impartially on all his children. A third says, God and believers are to be considered in the light of *master and servants*, and God rewards the imperfect services of his creatures with the rich benefits of christianity. A fourth considers God and believers in the relation of *king and consort*, and says, God gave christianity as an inalienable dowry to his chosen

associate. In all these systems, God, Christ, believers, and gift, remain the pure, genuine ideas of the text ; and the association of the idea of *relation* distinguishes and varies the systems.

In general, we form ideas of the Supreme Being, and we think such a being ought to act so and so, and therefore we conclude he does act so and so. God gives Christ to believers conditionally, says one ; for so it becomes a holy being to bestow all his gifts. God gives Christ unconditionally, says another ; for so it becomes a merciful being to bestow his gifts on the miserable. I repeat it again, opposite as these may appear, they both retain the notions of the same God, the same Jesus, the same believers, the same giving ; but an idea concerning *the fittest way of bestowing* the gift distinguishes and varies the systems. I call it the same giving, because all divines, even they, who go most into a scheme of conditional salvation, allow, that Christ is a blessing, infinitely beyond all that is due to the conditions, which they perform in order to their enjoyment of him.

Let us for a moment suppose, that this proposition, *God gives Christ to believers*, is the whole of revelation on this subject. A divine, who should affirm, that his ideas of time, relation, and condition, were necessarily contained in this scripture ; that his whole thesis was a doctrine of christianity ; and that the belief of it was essential to salvation, would affirm the most palpable absurdities ; for, although the proposi-

tion does say, Christ is God's gift to believers, yet it does neither say, *when* God bestowed this gift, nor *why* he bestowed it, nor that a precise knowledge of the *mode* of donation is essentially requisite to salvation. That God gave the world a Saviour in the person of Jesus, is a fact affirmed by Christ in this proposition, and therefore a christian doctrine. That he made the donation absolutely or conditionally, before the fall or after it, reversibly or irrevocably, the proposition doth not affirm; and therefore every proposition including any of these ideas is an article of belief containing a christian doctrine and a human explication, and consequently it lies before an examiner in different degrees of evidence and importance.

Suppose a man were required to believe this proposition, God gave Jesus to believers absolutely; or this, God gave Jesus to believers conditionally; it is not impossible, the whole proposition might be proved original, genuine, primary doctrine of Jesus Christ. Our proposition in this text could not prove it, and were this the whole of our information on this article, conditionality and unconditionality would be human explications; but, if Christ have given us in any other part of revelation, more instruction on the subject; if he any where affirm, either that he was given on certain conditions to be performed by believers, or that he was not given so, then indeed we might associate the ideas of one text with those of another, and so form of the whole a genuine christian doctrine.

When we have thus selected the instructions of our divine Master from the opinions of our fellow-pupils, we should suppose, these questions would naturally arise;—Is a belief of all the doctrines of Christ essential to salvation? If not, which are the essential truths? If the parable of the talents be allowed a part of his doctrine, and if the doctrine of proportion taught in that parable be true, it should seem, the belief of christian doctrines must be proportioned to exterior evidence and interior ability; and, on these principles, should a congregation of five hundred christians put these questions, they must receive five hundred different answers. *Who is sufficient for these things?* Let us renounce our inclination to damn our fellow-creatures. Let us excite all to faith and repentance, and let us leave the decision of their destiny to Almighty God. *When Christ cometh, he will tell us all things.* Till then let us wait, lest we should scatter *firebrands, arrows, and death,* and *make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom the Lord hath not made sad.* How many doctrines are essential to salvation, seems to me exactly such a question, as—how much food is essential to animal life?

We will venture to go a step further. Were we as capable of determining the exact ratio between any particular mind and a given number of ideas, as we are of determining how many feet of water a vessel of a given burden must draw; and were we able so to

determine how much faith in how many doctrines was essential to the holiness, and so to the happiness of such a soul ; we should not then entertain a vain notion of exacting by force these rights of God of his creature. For, first, the same proportion, which renders a certain number of ideas essential to the happiness of an intelligent mind, renders this number of ideas so clear, that they establish themselves and need no imposition. Secondly ; the nature of faith does not admit of imposition ; it signifies nothing to say, kings command it ; if angels commanded it, they would require an impossibility, and exact that of me, which they themselves could not perform. Thirdly ; God has appointed no means to enforce belief ; he has nominated no vicegerents to do this ; he has expressly forbidden the attempt. Fourthly ; the means, that one man must employ to impose his creed on another, are all nefarious, and damn a sinner to make a saint. Fifthly ; imposition of human creeds has produced so much mischief in the world, so many divisions among christians, and so many execrable actions, attended with no one good end to religion, that the repetition of this crime would argue a soul infested with the grossest ignorance, or the most stubborn obstinacy imaginable. Sixthly ; dominion over conscience is that part of God's empire of which he is most jealous. The imposition of a human creed is a third action, and before any man can perform it, *he must do two other exploits ; he must usurp the throne, and claim the slave.* How many more rea-

sons might be added ! From a cool examination of the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of christianity, the nature of all powers within the compass of human thought to employ, the history of past times, the state of the present, in a word, of every idea, that belongs to the imposition of a human creed, we venture to affirm, the attempt is irrational, unscriptural, impracticable, impossible. Creed is belief, and the production of belief by penal sanctions neither is, nor was, nor is to come. The project never entered the mind of a professor of any science, except that of theology. It is high time, theologists should explode it. The glorious pretence of establishing by force implicit belief, should be left to the little tyrant of a country school ; let him lay down dry documents, gird false rules close about other men's sons, lash docility into vanity, stupidity, or madness, and justify his violence by spluttering, *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas.*

Were christians sincere in their professions of moderation, candour, and love, they would settle this preliminary article of IMPOSITION ; and, this given up, there would be nothing else to dispute. Our objections lie neither against surplice nor service-book ; but against the imposition of them. Let one party of christians worship God as their consciences direct ; but let other parties forfeit nothing for doing the same. It may appear conjectural, but it is sincerely true, theological war is the most futile and expensive contest, *theological peace the cheapest acquisition in the world.*

Although the distinction of a divine revelation from a human explication is just and necessary ; although the principles of analogy, proportion, and perfection are undeniable ; and although, considered as a theory, the nature and necessity of universal toleration will be allowed to be as clear and demonstrative as possible, yet we are well aware, the allowance of these articles in all their fair, just, necessary consequences would be so inimical to many dispositions, and so effectually subversive of so many selfish, interested systems, that we entertain no hopes of ever seeing the theory generally reduced to practice. Heaven may exhibit a scene of universal love, and it is glorious to christianity to propose it ; it is an idea replete with extatic joy, and, thanks be to God, it is more than an idea, it is a law in many christian churches, alas ! little known, and less imitated by the rest of their brethren. *There is a remnant of Jacob in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.* These may cheerfully adopt the Prophet's exultation, *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ! If I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me ; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. In the day that my walls are to be built, in that day shall human decrees concerning conscience be far removed.*

HINTS
CONCERNING THE
INSTITUTION AND DISCIPLINE
OF THE
PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

FROM AN ORDINATION SERMON.

MUCH hath been written on the discipline of the primitive church ; but it is highly credible, it originated in some very plain fact, some very simple cause suited to the character of Jesus, and the condition of his disciples. If a cause adequate to all the effects be assigned, more would be redundant and ostentatious. Consider what I shall say on the subject, not as an investigation of it, nor as a reflection on others, nor as an oracle to you, but merely as a sketch of the first principles of a subject, which would fill many volumes ; principles, not now to be disputed, but merely stated ; principles, however, of real action, and tending to nothing but peace and virtue.

The discipline of the primitive churches was not taken from the *economy of Moses*. That economy was fastened to a place, confined within a given

period of time, and exhibited sensible objects to the worshippers. The late learned prelate, Bishop Warburton, in his life of the emperor Julian, hath clearly proved that the total subversion of the Mosaical dispensation was essential to the very being of the christian economy. As a theory, this is granted by all. In practice the case differs. Some christians in early times lost sight of this sound original maxim, and, unhappily, incorporated the discipline of the *temple* into the religion of Jesus, and on this mistake the Roman church is built. Hence the return of christians back into the bondage of infancy, regulated by meats, and days, and first elements of erudition. Hence a ritual, a pontiff, and a priesthood. Hence holy wars, and the defence of the faith by the sword of civil government. Hence a thousand institutes, all alien from the spirit of him, who said, *Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.*

The primitive discipline was not taken from the *synagogue*. Synagogues were a sort of oratories resembling our meeting-houses, chapels, or parish-churches, erected not for sacrifice, which was confined to the temple, but merely for purposes of devotion, and its appendage, instruction. It should seem, for reasons not now necessary to be mentioned, these houses were first erected at the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, when the condition of the people made such places necessary.

In Babylon they had lost the language in which their Scriptures were written, and it was necessary to remedy this inconvenience by glossing the text when it was read to the people, that they might not lose the sense in a confusion of terms. Here, on Sabbath days, the people assembled to pray, and to give and receive instruction by reading the holy Scriptures and expounding the sense. Order rendered rules necessary, and rules ripened into laws. In time these laws formed a system of parochial government ; so I think I may venture to call the jurisprudence of the synagogue. Many learned men have supposed that primitive christians adopted this discipline, and regulated their social worship by it. Probably some did so ; but it should seem they were Jews influenced by prejudices of education, and who, having only a slight knowledge of christianity, incorporated with it maxims of a polity not adapted to the views of their divine master ; for it would be easy to prove that the discipline of the synagogue was penal, practicable only in an assembly of rulers and subjects, and of course not fitted to a society of equals, which was the condition of the primitive church, as will be observed presently. Some have supposed, the Lord Jesus intended to recommend this discipline by his advice in case of trespass, recorded in the xviii of Matthew ; but that learned foreign lawyer, Professor Boehmer (let it not offend if we add, the best modern writer on this subject) hath elucidated the

text, and proved beyond contradiction, that the religion of Jesus did not, in its primitive institution, admit of any civil coercion; and consequently that its discipline was not that of the synagogue, which did.

The primitive discipline was not formally instituted by *Jesus Christ*. In vain we search for it in any of his public discourses, or private conversations. The Jews differed in speculations, but their rites were uniform, because their legislator had with precision adjusted every thing. But what chapter of the life of Jesus can any church produce, and say, here is our ritual; this is our order; these are the institutes of our discipline; this verse tells us how to admit a member; that how to elect an elder, a deacon, or a teacher; here we are told how to form a society; there how to preserve it; and in case of dissolution, this instructs us how to separate, or how to reassemble? On these subjects the wise master of our assemblies said nothing.

Finally, the discipline of the christian church was not expressly appointed by the *Apostles*. In the present view, the apostolical writings may be conveniently classed under four heads. Some are prophetical; as the Revelation of John, some paragraphs in the writings of Paul, and some detached verses of others. A second class are historical; as the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles many incidental names, dates, places, persons, and events. Prophecy affords no rules of discipline; history furnishes prece-

dents, but precedents however, which are law only to such as are in circumstances similar to those of the persons mentioned by the historians. The third class may be called expository of the christian doctrine, as the Epistle to the Hebrews written for the Jews, and the Epistles to the Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, and others, written for the Gentiles, or, to speak more properly, for societies composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Discipline here is an occasional subject, and it is chiefly applicable to the then state of the societies. In a similar state christians may adopt these prudential maxims, the end of all which is *peace, peace*. The last class consists of moral precepts adapted to the conditions of individuals. Is Timothy an overseer? He must be blameless. Is Paul aged? His advice ought to be respected. Are you a husband? Be kind. Are you a master? Be just and humane. Are you a servant? Be content with providence, diligent in business, and reverence your master. Are you a member of the christian body of believers? Imitate Jesus your pattern, and love your brethren. Nothing of all this can be called a christian ritual; and advice to a church, like advice to a wife, presupposes a state regulated by rules not mentioned by the adviser; and indeed the Apostles no more drew up a discipline, than they did a ritual for the hiring of servants, or the celebration of marriage.

What then ! Did Jesus leave this important article unsettled ? No. On the contrary, he finished it by an effort of wisdom truly divine. The Christian discipline rose of itself out of that *condition of equality*, into which Jesus put his disciples. He took twelve men of even rank, and perhaps with little dissimilitude of age and ability, and constituted them a family of love, or, if you will, a circle of friends. They were his whole church. Here was no master, no servant ; no priest, no people ; no prince, no subject ; no father, no son. It was not the union of a literal family like that of the temple ; or of a district like that of the synagogue ; or of a vague multitude like that which attended the preaching of Christ ; or of an universal body under the direction of universal itinerants, immediately inspired, as the churches were after his decease in the times of the Apostles ; but it was a state of the perfect equality of minds united by mutual benevolence.

What is discipline ? Order. What was primitive discipline ? Order without government, and above the want of it. In this exuberant soil of peace and freedom the human understanding unfolds itself in free inquiry, free from the frost of nipping penalties. The heart mellows into ripeness. Fear of God and love of his creatures, reverence for the first great cause and attachment to his image, meekness, gentleness, goodness, and devotion, form a fragrant compound of delicious taste ; or, to use the language of

Solomon, it is the *sweetness* of friendship, which, *like ointment and perfume, rejoices the heart*. It is not the fabric, however ornamented, it is this moral excellence, that excites the exclamations of christians ; and this in many a mean place hath impelled them to look upward and sing ; *Lord, I love the habitation of thine house, the place where thine honour dwelleth*.

Jesus left civil society untouched, and there rank and government are necessary ; but it is a fact that primitive christian societies were small, independent bodies of equals. Many ecclesiastical historians have observed this, and have remarked that the first christians never elected officers because they had no right to teach or to baptize, but because they had not all either ability or opportunity to officiate. Even women taught and baptized, but order required them to officiate only to their own sex, and therefore the first churches appointed them deaconesses. In large churches they were numerous ; they sat in public in a seat by themselves, and they were distinguished in the middle age by a small, grave ornament on the neck. The form of ordaining these female officers may be seen in the menologies of the Greek church. In the primitive church, order required a society of friends to visit and relieve each other, and, expedition being necessary in many cases, it was found advisable to elect a few to receive and distribute relief, to comfort the sick, to inspect the condition of prisoners, to try to procure their enlargement, and, in

brief, to manage their secular affairs, as well as to wait on the rest at the administration of the Lord's supper and baptism. In our small societies deacons execute these friendly offices without neglect to their worldly employments ; but in large primitive churches, as the office took up the whole time of a deacon, justice required an indemnity, not to say a reward, and the church wholly supported their deacons.

Hence in time, in declining churches, when the teachers had risen into a priesthood, they associated deacons into their order. In the middle of the third century, it should seem, by comparing a letter of Cyprian with another of Cornelius of Rome, and a passage in Optatus, there were in Rome at that time forty-four christian congregations in the Catholic connexion ; and in these churches there were on the list no less than fifteen hundred widows, sick, poor, and other objects of charity, wholly dependant on the liberality of the church. To the honour of the church, they were all supported ; and deacons, who had so much employment, were honourably maintained as justice required. Such equity ought to prevail in all our modern offices ; and a church that requires the whole time of an officer, deacon, or teacher, ought to support him ; and an election to such an office, not including an election to a maintenance, is not just.

THE
SPIRIT OF GOD
THE GUIDE OF GOOD MEN.

FROM THE VILLAGE DISCOURSES.

[To understand the force and appropriateness of many parts of Robinson's *Village Discourses* and *Morning Exercises*, it is necessary to keep in mind, that they were delivered in different places, sometimes in a private dwelling, an open field, or an orchard ; and, also, at different times of the day, sometimes early in the morning, and at others in the evening. It seems to have been the speaker's chief purpose to render his discourses simple and perspicuous, and adapted to the uncultivated minds of his hearers, who were labourers, living at a distance from the stated place of worship, and indifferently instructed in religion. Occasional omissions in the articles selected from the Discourses and Exercises are indicated by asterisks.]

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Romans, viii. 14.

THE old prophets had a spirit of prophecy, and a spirit of holiness ; that is, they had the Spirit of God ; they knew a little of those future events, which God

perfectly understood, and which little he imparted to them ; and they possessed a little degree of such justice and goodness as God possesses in infinite perfection. Jesus Christ is a new character, having the Spirit of God without measure, possessing wisdom, justice, goodness, and every excellence in unlimited variety, and in absolute perfection. What did Jesus Christ with this fulness of the Spirit of God ? He communicated it to his disciples, *and so sent them even as his Father sent him*, saying, *receive ye the Holy Ghost*. Christ did not communicate to them, for they were not capable of receiving it, all the Spirit of God that dwelt in him ; but he communicated it in part, therefore they *knew in part, and prophesied in part*. When they were children, they thought and spoke as children ; but when they became men, they *put away childish things*. The question is, what did Jesus communicate to his Apostles for the Holy Ghost ? This question is properly answered by distinguishing extraordinary powers, peculiar to themselves, and necessary to obtain a hearing of their doctrine in the world, from ordinary communications common to them and to all other good men to the end of the world.

When Christ came into the world, and condescended to ask a distracted race of men to give him a hearing, what glorious reasons did he stoop to bestow ! He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he *fed the multitude*, he empowered his Apostles to

speak with divers tongues, and to perform many miracles, all for the good of society, all to *convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*. During the life of Christ he communicated to his Apostles his own ideas of things, what notion he had of God, what of scripture, what of a future state ; and his wisdom made them wise. He imparted to them his own just and gentle tempers, and through his goodness they became good. He communicated to them proper actions, and by seeing how he conducted himself, they learned how to behave themselves. These communications, ordinary and extraordinary, are what one of them calls, a *receiving out of his fullness grace for grace*.

Before Jesus Christ left the world, he promised the Apostles to supply his absence, after he should have left them, by *another Comforter, even the spirit of truth*, which, saith he, *ye know, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you* ; that is, the truths you know now shall be increased and multiplied, and you shall know them better, and more to your comfort, after my death than you have done before. After his resurrection, as he had promised, he *saw them again* ; and while he was eating with them, he commanded them that they should not go out of town, but wait at *Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, which*, said he, *ye have heard of me ; for ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence*. Accordingly about forty days after his death, and a

few days after his ascension, they received the Holy Ghost in a rich abundance both of ordinary and extraordinary powers, the first in a very high degree of excellence, and the last in a manner peculiar to themselves. The Apostles had these powers in trust to communicate to others, and they executed the trust faithfully by imparting their extraordinary knowledge how to heal the sick, and how to speak with tongues, to some others, and this knowledge ceased when these extraordinary men died ; but such ideas as were necessary for the salvation of ordinary Christians to the end of the world they left in writing, and so bequeathed as it were to posterity that Holy Spirit, which they had received of their divine Master for the use of all mankind.

Thus the history of the Holy Ghost stands in Scripture divided into three periods ; the first, from Adam to Christ, was a Holy Spirit of prophecy ; the second, in the life of Christ, was a Holy Spirit of prophecy, information, and promise, accompanied with wisdom to know how to work miracles, and power to give it effect ; the third, from Pentecost to the moment in which the apostle John wrote the last line of his gospel, was a holy dispensation of wisdom, goodness, and power, partly proper to that age and ceasing with it, and partly containing intelligence to inform and direct religion to the end of time. * * *

Having thus seen the rise and the accomplishment of the promise of an universal religion under the ad-

ministration of Jesus Christ, and having got possession of the book that contains the whole of that religion, let us proceed to examine the book, and particularly with a view to the Holy Spirit, and his influence in religion ; for *as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*. To give you at once my notion of the subject, I think our Apostle took his idea of the christian church being *led* by the Spirit, from that favourite part of the history of his country so often mentioned in the writings of the prophets, and so faithfully recorded by their first historian Moses, I mean God's *leading* the Israelites through the wilderness into the land of promise. Sometimes it is said simply, *God led them* through the wilderness. Sometimes it is said, the Holy Spirit led them *by the right hand of Moses*. Sometimes they are said to be led *with a cloud, and with a light of fire* ; and in this manner the wise men of the east were led by a star to Jesus Christ. God in all these cases made use of means, and the work was no less his for using means to effect his purpose. In this manner I suppose the Holy Spirit by the Scriptures guides all good men. The cloud was not in the Israelites, nor was the star in the wise men ; but there was in them a knowledge of the use and intent of these appearances, and a conformity of action to their own ideas.

Here then two things rise to view in our subject ; a guide without us, and a disposition within us ; and

the last seems to me to be an effect of the first, and both the work of one and the same spirit. Suppose a world without a Bible, and you have no idea of any Spirit of God as a spirit of religion in the inhabitants of it. Suppose, on the other hand, a Bible in a world without an inhabitant, and you have no notion of influence ; the *Spirit of God* is there, but nothing knows or worships him ; *the earth is without form and void, and darkness is upon the face of the deep*. If God calls for light, it will come ; if for land and water, they will appear ; if for the sun and moon, and stars, they will be ; if for fish, and fowl, and beasts, they will appear ; but there will be no religion till man comes, nor then any revealed religion till the book and the man meet, and then the child of God will be *led by the Spirit of God*. My supposition is a fact. The Bible lies about in many parts of the world without readers, and there lies all our holy religion like Jesus dead in the sepulchre. There are, on the contrary, many places where the Bible is read ; but it is not among men, but mere animals, who eat and drink, and marry and give in marriage, and buy and sell, and build and plant, and are so full of these ideas, that they never attend to religious truth, before death comes and destroys them all. *So it was in the days of Noah, so it was also in the days of the Son of Man*, and so it will be to the end of the world. In a word, there is no magic in the Bible to operate without reason and conscience ;

and there is no religion in man without revelation. If we lay aside the Scriptures we have no standard to judge by, and if we have no judgment the standard is of no use.

Let us apply these general observations to particular cases, in order to understand how the Spirit of God *leads* all good men. We have determined, that it is by means of scripture truths, and that it implies the exercise of some dispositions in us. I am aware of the questions you will ask, and I only defer stating the question till it comes properly before us, as it will presently by supposing a case, which is not a mere supposition, because it comes to pass every day. Suppose a man, who had never thought of religion, to lose by death the first of all earthly pleasures, the agreeable partner of his life, or, as a prophet calls his wife, *the desire of his eyes*. O dreadful calamity, sound fit to raise the dead ! *Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke ! I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died*. Awhile the man, thunderstruck, can hardly believe it true, and hopes against hope, till time, cruel time, kills his hope, and drives him to despair. The more he thinks, the more occasion he sees for grief. Every thing he sees pierces him to the heart ; and in every place a lovely picture of her that was, and the ghastly features of her that is no more, meet his eyes, and melt down all his soul in wo. The sun does not

shine, the stars do not sparkle, the flowers do not scent, the world does not look as it used to do ; the world seems dead, his house is a tomb, and all his domestics dreary ghosts. Now he feels the vanity of the world, takes up his Bible, perhaps to look after the desire of his eyes, and try whether he can find any thing in her present state to assuage his pain. This man hath religion to seek, and it is indifferent which end of the Bible he begins at ; either will *lead* him right. If with the prophets, they will hand him on from one to another, till they conduct him downward to Christ ; if with the Apostles, they will direct him upward to the same person, who is a *light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel.*

This man, thus led to Christ, will be instructed by reading his sermons, by observing his actions, and by examining how his Apostles understood and explained his meaning, by applying it to several cases both of individuals and collective bodies, which fell out after his death, and during their inspiration ; and perceiving the truth and beauty of all this, and finding a satisfaction in it calming his mind and producing in him a pleasure never experienced before, he will become a convert to the christian religion, and choose to make the truths of it the rules of his action, and the ground of his hope. This man is *led* step by step to a moment in life, in which he becomes a new man ; rises, as it were, from the dead into *newness of*

* * * He hath always been a child asleep in the arms of his father, and when he woke he found himself in his arms. Call in now all the means used to *lead* this man to the spot where he now is, and inquire, which of them made this man a christian? Was it any one of your Prophets or Apostles? We might indeed *the message which we heard of God, declared* unto him; but we were not acquainted with him till lately; he had, when we found him, eyes to read, ears to hear, and understanding to receive, a conscience to reprove, and he was in a condition neither melancholy nor mad, but disposed to the use of them. In a word, there is a chain of events, one of which brings on another, and of all which God is the first cause; and if you can suppose the life of the man just now mentioned to consist of a number of five thousand events, and that three thousand and fifty came to pass before he touched the holy scriptures, and that his reading them was the three thousand and fifty-first event, I should call three thousand and fifty, acts of God as the God of nature, three thousand and fifty-first an act of God as the God of grace; and though I should think him *led* all along before by the same God, yet I should from that recent date his being *led by the Spirit of God*, as a Father of truth and holiness revealing himself in scripture as the Saviour of sinners, and in no other way. When the Spirit of God *saves a soul from death*, by *erecting a sinner from the error of his way*, what

doth he? Doth he create any new senses or faculties, new eyes in the body, or new powers in the soul? Certainly not; for as there is no want of any new powers, so if they were, they would not be what Christ came to redeem, nor would they need sanctification. The whole work of the Spirit seems to me to consist in two things; the one, a proposing of the truths of religion, and this is done in the holy Scriptures; the other, a disposing of the mind to admit the truth, and this is done by means of various sorts, by prosperity, by adversity, by education, by conversation, by sickness, and by a thousand other methods, parts of a whole complicated government, of which God is the first cause. In order to explain the subject, or rather (it becomes me to say of such a subject) my notion of it, I beg your attention to three reflections of reason, scripture, and experience.

I call it *reasonable* to give God as much glory for bringing an event to pass by means, as without them; yea, in some sense more. I will explain myself. It is the opinion of some christians, that the Holy Ghost regenerates a soul immediately, that is suddenly, and without any thing between himself and the soul, and they are zealous to support this idea of regeneration for the very laudable purpose of securing all the honour of this work to God. We praise the motive, for too much care cannot be taken to render to God a glory so justly his due; but we cannot see that the work is less his for his making use of

means to effect it ; for whose are the means but his own? The more means he thinks proper to use, the more he displays his glorious perfections. In all his other works he makes use of means. He warms us by means of fire, he feeds us by means of bread, he refreshes us in the day by air, and in the night by sleep, he creates us and brings us into being by means of our parents, and he removes us by means of diseases. Name, if it be possible, a single event in the whole world brought to pass without means. If we go from the body to the mind, still the same wise order prevails. Our eyes distinguish colours ; but colours are not God, but rays of light differently disposed. Our ears distinguish sounds, but sounds are only air. Our feelings find out hardness, softness, rough, smooth, and so on. There is not a single thought, in all the multitude we have in our minds, which hath not been brought thither by some means or other. What is more, every thought is connected with another thought, and that with another, and so on till we are lost in the distance or the crowd.

Now, we ask, is that which God doth by means less his doing than if it were performed without means ? Is not the last effect as much his as the first ? Who gave us this year a plentiful harvest ? You say, God. You say right, because God formed six thousand years ago sun and earth, air and water, wheat and barley, and fixed all in such a state that they came to you last harvest exactly in such pro-

portion as he at first appointed them. One great argument for the truth of the christian religion is, that it exactly resembles the world of nature, and so proves itself to be the work of the same God; and if it were not so, if religion were not like other things which we are sure God made, we should have no certain rules to know, when we received a religion whether it were a body of truth coming from God to make us happy, or a set of errors contrived by wicked men to make us miserable. Did ever any man conceive that the sun, or the air, or the water, or the trees, or fish, fowl, and cattle were the invention and production of man? Nobody ever thought so. Why? Because they have characters of size, shape, duration, and perfection, above all the skill and power of man to produce. Bring forth ten thousand things to view having the same characters of perfection in their kind, and we instantly know the maker; but produce something with different characters, and the author becomes doubtful, and it is no further probable that he created it than as it resembles his other works. Apply this to our subject. If God regenerates us by means, if he makes us wise by informing us of truth, and good by proposing good reasons to us for being so, then religion resembles his other works; but if we be wise without truth, and good without motive, then a new work appears without the characters of his other works, and consequently without any evidence to persuade us it is his. Thus, reason

seems to plead for the truth of our notion of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The chief objection against this account seems to me a strong reason in favour of it. If this account be true, say some, the work of the Spirit may be explained and described as clearly as any other part of religion, and we shall know what the work of the Spirit is ; whereas we have been taught to believe that the work is a mystery, which no man knoweth, no, not he that receiveth it ; and this notion seems confirmed by this text, *the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* In answer to this, and every other objection taken from Scripture, we have proposed to make a second reflection on the language of Scripture concerning this subject, and we shall put the passages into two classes.

In the first, we put such as speak of this work under figures or *similitudes* ; as where the Spirit is said to be like *wind, fire, water.* All Scriptures of this kind are explained by one distinction between the nature and the effects of things. It is one thing to know the nature of fire, and air, and water, and it is another to know the effects they produce. No man fully knows the first ; but the last are as clear as daylight. Is there a man in this assembly, who doth not know, what effect fire will produce in wood or water, and wind in mill work, and so on ? When our Lord said,

Every one that is born of the Spirit is so as you, Nicodemus, are in the wind ; he knows the effects, and that knowledge is sufficient to direct his actions ; my instructions are intended to make men good men, and not philosophers. Observe, it was Nicodemus who said, *how* can these things be ? And the reproof given him by Jesus Christ would have been improper had the subject been a mystery ; art thou a master of Israel and *knowest not* these things. We speak that we do *know* and testify that we have *seen*. The subject of their conversation was not the nature of the Spirit, but his influences in religion. Now, said our Lord, the religion I teach is spiritual, it doth not stand like yours in *meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed until the time of reformation for the purifying of the flesh*, but in effects upon the mind and heart ; you see no temple, no priesthood, no sacrifices in my religion ; let not this offend you ; my religion resembles the wind, which no man ever saw, but the effects of which you and all other men perfectly understand. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* In this manner expound all the passages, that speak of the Spirit's work under similitudes, and you will find no difficulty in them.

In a second class, I put all such Scriptures as describe the work of the Spirit. The apostle Peter had

seen a great deal of this work, and one day of his life, such a day as that in which *three thousand souls were added*, produced more and better experiments than ordinary teachers have an opportunity of seeing in their whole life. He saw religion in every form, and examined single conversions, separately and alone, and his whole life was a course of experiments, a part of which are recorded in Acts ; and we have reason to believe, though we have no account of the twenty-four last years of his life in Scripture, that he continued to old age in the exercise of instructing and converting mankind, or, as our Lord calls it, *feeding the lambs and the sheep* of Christ. The testimony of such a man is extremely respectable. It is a testimony of inspiration explained and confirmed by experiment. Now he says, that the *strangers scattered throughout Pontus*, and other countries, who were *elect through sanctification of the Spirit*, were *born again of incorruptible seed by the word of God, which word by the Gospel was preached unto them*. This account of regeneration is partly literal, and partly figurative. The Gospel is the word of God ; the Gospel was preached unto you. These are literally true. The Gospel containing the word of God which was preached unto you is an *incorruptible seed*, of which you were born again ;— these are figurative expressions, and must be expounded by the literal terms, and clearly mean a dependence of the three excellencies that constitute a regenerate man

on the three principal parts of religion, in which they had been instructed.

"The Gospel proposes a set of clear truths; Christians examine and believe these truths." The Gospel proposes a set of motives; Christians feel these motives; fear hell, desire heaven, love holiness, and so on. The Gospel proposes a set of rules to live by; Christians reduce these rules to practice. Christians thus are born into a new world, having the new powers necessary to live in that world; they have new objects and new ideas; they have new motives and new feelings; they have new laws and a new life. The apostle not only saw all this in others, but he felt all this exemplified in himself. He was in the exercise of his trade, casting a net into the sea; when a person walking on the beach called to him, and said, *follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men.* This word of the Lord was like that at the creation, *let there be light*; and the history of the rest of Peter's existence may be contained in this word, *there was light*. When he afterward fell into a swoon, and returned again to sin and to fishing, he was *begotten again*, unto a lively hope, not without means, laid by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Here is the work, the whole ordinary work of the Holy Spirit; but all wrought by hearing these strangers purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit; that is, through the knowledge of things as reported unto them, by them: thus

preached the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, to enable the preachers to speak the divers tongues of these strangers, and of all others to whom they were sent, that so their faith might stand on what they clearly understood. * * * *

This brings us to our last reflection on christian experience. If means have no place in the christian religion till after the production of something in the soul containing the whole new man, then the use of means is only to nourish and cherish this new principle; that is to say, they are to a christian what air and earth and moisture are to an acorn. All christians seem to act as if they thought the means appointed to produce the end, and the fitness of the means is the support of christian action. On this principle we educate our children, because instruction seems to us a proper method of producing in them knowledge. On this principle we read and expound the Scriptures in public; not that the Scriptures want any expounding, to cool and attentive minds, but because the minds of most men are not in such a state, but blinded with prejudice, custom, and passion, and because we know such a mind is not prepared to attend to reason. On this principle we address the Gospel not only to the righteous and well disposed, but also to men of a quite different character.

One great argument in defence of our holy religion is that it is fitted not only to saints, but also to

sinners, even to such as are in the last and most deplorable stages of vice. If you say, God works in the means; this is what we plead for; if you affirm on the contrary that he works immediately, then there is no more fitness in instructing the ignorant, or reasoning with the wicked, and expecting knowledge and reformation to follow, than there would be in planting and watering flints and pebbles, and expecting them to grow into oaks. Go further, go back to the regeneration of any one christian in this assembly, and divide yourselves into two parts. Some of you do not know the time of your conversion; that is as much as to say, the work of the Spirit was so connected with other events that one thing brought on another till all together issued in your conversion, for you are a sincere convert to the faith of Christ. Others of you resemble the man supposed some time ago, and you know what events fell out when you became christians; but the connexion of an effect with a cause destroys the notion of immediate influence. One says, such a providence set me a thinking; another says, such a discourse set me a repenting; a third says, such a book gave me information that produced comfort. All of us believe, the means of religion are highly fitted to answer their end; and the certainty of obtaining the end in the use of means, is the sun that rules the day, and the moon that rules the night of life.

and of askeing what should be done to bring about the same

We cannot conclude this subject without two reflections. First, we perceive a wonderful inclination in christians toward something in religion so sublime as not to be understood; whereas the true sublimity of religion lies in its plainness, as the true excellence and dignity of man consist in his becoming such a plaid man as Jesus Christ was. This inclination is a remnant of the old education given this country by monks and priests; whose majesty stood in the credulousness of their followers. They made creeds, or articles to be believed, and gave them to our forefathers to say over. You do not understand them, said they, but we do; and, while they were doing that, the creed-makers ran away with their houses and lands. Let us renounce this disposition, and let us believe nothing but what we understand.

Lastly, we observe with great pleasure that all christians allow the Spirit of God is a Holy Spirit, and even they who think him hidden, think they have no right to conclude he is where they suppose, till the fruits of a holy life declare it. Should a man, who had lived wickedly all his days, be intoxicated with liquor over night and regenerated at six next morning by an immediate work of the Spirit, no christians would believe it that day; and should he, like Saul, to assay to join himself to the disciples, they would be all afraid of him, and not believe that he was a disciple till some Barnabas should declare unto them; one, how the Lord had spoken to him;

and the other, *how he had boldly preached at Damascus*; till he had given substantial proofs by his conduct that his pretensions were true and real. If an extraordinary conversion was not credible without proof, ~~how much less are ordinary conversions?~~ The proof of proofs is laid by the Holy Spirit where it ought to be. *If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. Let not a man think himself to be something when he is nothing; but let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another man.*

and he had boldly preached as if he were a prophet, and he had given substantial proofs by his words and deeds, that the promises were true and real. The observation was not credible without

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

THE HOLY SPIRIT WHERE IT IS NOT EASY TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

FROM THE VILLAGE DISCOURSES.

When ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Ephes. iii. 4.

By christianity, I mean that religion which Jesus Christ taught his disciples, and which is all contained in the New Testament. Retain this observation, for it frees the subject from many difficulties. Some misguided christians propose a great number of mysteries, that is, secrets to us; such as that the bread and wine in the Lord's supper cease to be bread and wine, and become the flesh, and bones, and blood of Christ; such as that a wicked man is inspired by the Holy Ghost to lead us to heaven without our knowing the way; and that these wonders are performed by the uttering of certain words by a certain set of men; and these secrets, which nobody so much as pretends to understand, we are required to believe. However, we have one short answer for all mysteries of this kind; that is, they are

world began ; the last will be after this world shall end ; the middle part is before us now. There is no secret in either of these parts ; but there are incomprehensible mysteries connected with each of them. In regard to the first, it is impossible to be supposed, by a man who knows any thing of God, that the christian religion came into the world without the Creator's knowing that such an event would take place ; and it is impossible for such a man to imagine that, after the present life, there will be no distinction made between the righteous and the wicked. There is no mystery in these general principles ; but we may render them extremely perplexed by rashly agitating questions connected with them.

In regard to Christianity in this present life, every thing in it is exceeding plain. Is the character of Jesus Christ a secret ? Did ever any body take him for an idle gentleman, a cruel tyrant, a deceitful tradesman, a man of gross ignorance and turbulent passions ? On the contrary, is it not perfectly clear that he was the person foretold by the Prophets of his country, who should come, himself perfectly wise and good, to instruct mankind in the knowledge and worship of God ? Is the character of Scripture a secret ? Is it not perfectly clear, that it is a wise and good book, full of information on all the subjects that concern religion and morality ? Is it a secret that we are mortal and must die ; or that we are depraved, and

apt to live in the omission of duty and the practice of sin ; or that a life of sin is connected with a course of misery, for pursuing which we deserve blame ? Is it a secret whether God takes notice of the actions of men, or whether he will forgive a penitent and punish the impenitent ? In a word, is the character of God a secret in the christian religion ; and is it a mystery whether he be an object worthy of our adoration and imitation ? Were I obliged to give a short account of the christian religion, I would not say it is a revelation of the decrees of God, or a revelation of the resurrection of the dead, or a revelation of the mercy of God to a repenting sinner through the merit of Jesus Christ ; for though each of these be true, yet all these are only *parts of his ways* ; but I would call christianity a revelation, or a making known of the true and real character of God ; and I would affirm of the whole, and of each component part, that it was so made known as to be free from all mystery, in regard to the truth of the facts, and yet so connected as to contain mysteries beyond the comprehension of finite minds. I would affirm further, that our religion is confined to the belief and practice of only what is revealed, and that every thing untold is a matter of conjecture, and no part of piety towards God and benevolence to mankind.

Take heart, then, my good brethren ; you may understand, practise, and enjoy all this rich gift of God to man, just as you enjoy the light of the day,

and refreshment by rest at night. Let no one say, I was born in poverty, I have had no learning, I have no friends, my days are spent in labour, and I have no prospect except that of drawing my last breath where I drew my first. All this may be true ; but all this will not prevent your knowing, and practising, and enjoying the christian religion, the founder of which had not what the *birds of the air have, where to lay his head.*

When I say all may understand it, I mean if their own depravity does not prevent it. Plainly, you cannot know it if you do not attend to it ; nor can you know it, though you do attend, if you do not attend to christianity itself, but to something else put instead of it. Let me explain myself.

One says, I cannot understand the nature and force of religion ; and pray, is there any thing wonderful in your ignorance ? Consider, you never read the Scriptures ; you never ask any body to read them to you ; you hate and persecute good men ; you seldom enter a place of worship ; you keep wicked company like yourself ; you are often seen in the practice of enormous crimes. Are you the man to complain, I cannot understand religion ? It would be a mystery indeed, if a man who never turned his attention to a subject, should know any thing certain about it. We have no such mystery in all the christian religion. Christians do not live like you.

Another says, I am a very sober man, I go constantly to a place of worship, and I cannot comprehend the christian religion. All this is very true; you are a sober, decent character, and regular in your attendance on public worship; but recollect, I am speaking not of your body, but of your mind. Now, it is a fact, abroad or at home, in the church or in the barn, your attention is always taken up with other things, and so taken up as to leave no room *for the things which belong unto your everlasting peace*. Sometimes your corn, sometimes your cattle, sometimes taxes and rates, and sometimes your rent and your servants' wages; but, at all times, to live in this present world, engrosses all your attention. You, you resemble yon child fast asleep, without knowing it, in the arms of a parent. *God besets you behind and before, and lays his hand upon you. It is he that watereth the ridges of your corn, and settleth the furrows thereof; he maketh the earth soft with showers; he clothes thy pastures with flocks, and crowns the year with his goodness. It is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, and multiplieth thy herds and thy flocks, and thy silver and thy gold, and all that thou hast.* And you, inattentive man! you cannot comprehend that you are under an obligation to know and do the will of this generous benefactor. What does christianity require of you, but to love and serve this God? If you do not serve him, it is because you do not love him; if you do not love

him, it is because you do not know him ; and if you do not know him, it is not for the want of evidence, but attention.

It is not only to you that I affirm this connexion between attention and knowledge ; for if this barn were filled with statesmen and scholars, generals and kings, I should be allowed to say to one, Sir, you understand intrigue ; to another, Sir, you understand war, to besiege a town, and rout an army ; to a third, Sir, you understand law, and every branch of the office of a conservator of the peace ; to another, Sir, you understand languages and arts and sciences ; and you all understand all these, because you have studied them ; but here are two things which you have not studied, and which therefore you do not know ; the one, how to plough, and sow, and reap, and thresh an acre of wheat ; and the other, how to live holily in this world, so as to live happily in the world to come. Are you not convinced, my good brethren, that the same circumstance, which prevents those gentlemen from knowing how to perform the work that you perform every day with pleasure, prevents you from knowing the practice and the pleasure of true christianity ? In both cases the subject hath not been attended to.

I go further, and venture to affirm, if religion could be understood without attention, it would be a misfortune ; a misfortune depriving us of many advantages and leading us to commit many crimes.

The ease with which we acquired knowledge would sink the value of it, and *darkness would have communion with light.*

As attention is absolutely necessary, so it is equally necessary that attention should be fixed upon the christian religion itself, and nothing else. We hear often of the mysteries of religion ; let us not forget that there are *mysteries of iniquity*. Ignorance, covetousness, tyranny, especially tyranny over conscience, all wrap themselves in mystery ; but if we incorporate any of these mysteries with the christian religion, and attend to them, instead of distinguishing and attending to pure christianity, we may attend and study, but we shall never know ; we shall be *ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* The doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, and deliverances of the Apostle Paul, were *fully known*, and diligently followed by common christians ; but who ever knew the doctrine of transubstantiation, or that of the infallibility of a frail, sinful man ? Who of us, uninspired men, knows the feelings of a person under the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost ? In vain we pursue such mysteries as these ; the stronger the attention, the greater the mortification of not being able to succeed. If one place religion in impulses, another in new revelations, a third in a state of perfection, a fourth in discoveries and enjoyments inconsistent

with our present state, and not set before us in the christian religion, they may well be filled with doubts and fears, and spend life in complaining of the crooked and dreary paths of religion. If, on the contrary, we attend only to what is revealed, to believe only what is reported with sufficient evidence, to practise only what is commanded by the undoubted voice of God ; if we seek only such pleasures and distinctions as we are taught in Scripture to expect ; in a word, if we would *acquaint ourselves only with God, and be at peace one with another, thereby good should come unto us.*

When I said, all of you might understand christianity, I meant, there was nothing in christianity but what might be understood if it were properly attended to, and nothing in the natural condition of any individual (I do not say his moral state) to prevent his attending to it. There is no capacity so mean, no creature so forlorn, as to be beyond the reach of the benefits conferred upon men by Jesus Christ. You are a babe ; in his Gospel there is *milk for babes* ; truths adapted to nourish and cherish a little, feeble mind. You are poor ; *the poor have the Gospel preached to them* ; the glad tidings of a Redeemer, and all his benefits. You are unlearned ; but the *highway of holiness* is so plain, that *a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.* You are so bashful, and so unused to company, that you are necessarily deprived of the pleasure of the company

and conversation of good men ; but you have better company than that of good men ; and you, you poor shepherd, you will behold the *heavens, the work of the fingers of your God* ; you will *consider the moon and the stars*, and the Saviour and the heaven *which he hath ordained*, till you cry out, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him ?* And upon these subjects *the tongue of the stammerer shall be ready to speak eloquently !* The christian religion enlarges and ennobles the mind, purifies and refines the heart, and adorns the life ; and a christian labourer, exercising his own understanding, is a more beautiful sight than an unjust judge in all the pomp of his office.

THE JEWS.

FROM THE MORNING EXERCISES.

Afterward shall the children of Israel fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days. Hosea, iii. 5.

ALWAYS when I see a Jew, I recollect a saying of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah, *thou art the seed of Abraham, my friend* ; and I find a thousand thoughts in my mind, impelling me to my duty. I am going this morning just to give you a sketch of a subject, that would fill volumes, and a subject of which we ought not to be ignorant.

First, let us inform ourselves of the general *history* of this people. The father of the family was Abraham. He was born in the East, of an *idolatrous* family, and, at the command of God, he became the first dissenter in the world. He quitted his country, and went and set up the worship of one God in his own family, and *taught* them to practise it. From this man proceeded a family, which increased into tribes, and formed a people as the *stars* in the heaven, or the *sand* on the seashore for multitude. Idolatry and immorality sometimes infected a few ; but

the bulk preserved the belief of one God, and the imitation of his perfections, inviolably for ages. They were shepherds, and lived, imbosomed in forests and fastnesses, a plain, frugal, laborious life, unacquainted with the world, and unpractised in the arts and luxuries of polished nations. They assembled to worship God by prayer and sacrifice at every new moon, where the old heads of families taught morality, and inculcated the hope excited by the promise of God, that in one of their family, all the families of the earth should be blessed with the knowledge of their God and their morality. Thus read the book of Genesis, and other scripture histories of the same times, and without forming any romantic ideas of imitation, impossible except in their circumstances, admire the history, approve the prophecy, and copy the inoffensive purity of their lives.

When these people were in slavery in Egypt, they were at a school in which Providence taught them, by their own feelings, the nature and the worth of liberty, both civil and religious. What noble efforts they made to obtain it, and how God crowned their honest endeavours with success under the direction of Moses, Joshua, and the Judges, you will read in the four books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. When they changed their government into an absolute monarchy, they enslaved themselves, and overwhelmed their country with idolatry, immorality, and calamities of every kind. Read the prophecies with

the light of history of times, persons, and places, which is contained in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, and you will easily discover what religion had to object against a tyrannical government, an idolatrous worship, and dissolute manners ; and what it had to do in bearing affliction, reforming worship, and cherishing hope of better times under the direction of the expected Prince of the house of David.

When he came, and addressed himself to the blessing of all nations with an universal religion, some of his countrymen put him to death ; but others espoused his cause, wrote his history, and reasoned to establish it, not in the form of a secular kingdom, but in the convictions and consciences of reasonable men. There it hath stood ever since ; and, though the bulk of the Jews have been scattered and punished for crucifying Christ, yet by being kept a separate people, they serve to prove the truth of the Gospel ; and the text, with many others like it, promises that *they shall reverence the Lord in the latter days.* The Epistle to the Hebrews lies ready for their use at that day. I think nothing can be easier than to apply this historical knowledge to its proper use ; and yet some christians have got such an unwise and wayward knack of reasoning, as to quote whatever was among the Jews in proof of what ought to be now ; as if the economy that crucified Christ was to restore him his character and dignity !

Remark next the *customs* of this people. They serve, as their history does, to interpret Scripture. Our text is connected with one. A part of this prophecy is a drama. I will try to make you understand me. A drama, in our present view, is a subject both related and represented. Divines call it preaching by signs. These signs were proper to represent to the eye the subject spoken of to the ear. Thus Jeremiah explained slavery with a *yoke* upon his neck ; and Jesus simplicity, by setting a *little child* before his disciples. * * * *

Further, let us allow the *merit* of the Jews. They deserve all the reputation, which the inspired writers give them. They exhibit single characters of consummate virtue, as Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, Nehemiah for love of his country, and so on. As a nation they excelled in some periods in arms, in others in industry, commerce, splendour, and wealth ; and in all in good writers ; for what historians are equal to Moses and the evangelists, or what ancient poetry breathes such pure and sublime sentiments as that of the Jews ? As a church they preserved the oracles of God, and at their fall their remnants became the *riches of the world*. The Apostle of us Gentiles was a Jew, and to say all in one word, the Saviour and the Judge of mankind was a *Jew*. Let us respect the ancient Jews in the persons of their children, and for their sakes let us be friends to universal toleration.

Let us recollect the *sins* and the *calamities* of these people. Their sins were many and enormous ; but it was the *killing* of Jesus Christ, that completed their ruin. Let us examine what sins brought Jesus to the cross, and let us avoid the practice of them. Nor let us forget their calamities. They have been under all the punishments foretold four thousand years ago by Moses, and seem doomed to travel over the world to recommend a Gospel which they reject and despise. Their prophets, we find, did not slander them ; they are the people described, and their punishments prove the divine mission of their prophets. Thus God is glorified, whether man be lost or saved. In some future time he will be glorified in us, either his mercy if we embrace it, or his justice if we reject it ; for to reject the Gospel is to reject both the mercy and the justice of God.

Let us finish by observing the *recall* of the Jews. The prophets foretel it, and a course of events renders it probable. They are preserved a distinct people, though the nations that conquered them are lost. They are more numerous now than they were when a nation. The Gospel is truth and virtue struggling against error and vice ; it is natural to hope that the stronger must in time subdue the weaker. Error and vice are supported by man ; but truth and virtue by God. Let us not despair. The Jews came out of Egypt under the conduct of a shepherd with only a rod in his hand to point out the way.

Providence is at no loss for means to effect its purposes ; *he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*

There are four things implied in the text, which the Jews will reverence in the latter days. First, That divine *patience*, which bore with their provocations ; *after* they have rejected Moses and the Prophets, after they have committed crimes of every sort, after they have crucified Christ, persecuted his Apostles, and persevered for ages in approving the crime ; *afterward* shall the children of Israel reverence the Lord for his patience, which outlasted all their perverseness.

Next, they will reverence his *providence*, which, when they were persecuted in one country, always provided them an asylum in another. Providence hath given them skill, and made them useful to many nations. It hath prospered their industry, and crowned it with plenty, so that their riches are almost as proverbial as their infidelity. When Jews from all countries, in their latter days, shall compile their own history of the dispersion, it must needs display a bright scene of providence, which they themselves will reverence in those days.

Will they not always reverence the *grace* of God ? The Lord will both forgive their offences, and restore them to favour. To this we add, the *glory* of God, as another object of reverence. Great and marvellous displays of divine power have been made in

favour of this people formerly, and, it should seem by the prophecies, more such displays will be made in favour of them at their *return to their first husband*. May God hasten it in his time.

What remains? Only this at present. Let us avoid putting stumblingblocks in the way of the Jews. Let us propose Christianity to them as Jesus proposed it to them. Instead of the modern magic of scholastical divinity, let us lay before them their own prophecies. Let us show them their accomplishment in Jesus. Let us applaud their hatred of idolatry. Let us show them the morality of Jesus in our lives and tempers. Let us never abridge their civil liberty, nor ever try to force their consciences. Let us remind them, that as Jews they are bound to make the law of Moses the rule of their actions. Let us try to inspire them with suspicion of rabbinical and received traditions, and a generous love of investigating religious truth for themselves. Let us avoid all rash judging, and leave their future state to God. Read at your leisure the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah, in the beginning of which Jesus Christ is described as the *Judge* of the world, and the passage is explained in that sense in the Revelation of John. It is the judge alone, whose habit is stained with blood; the saints, white and clean, only follow him to behold and applaud his justice.

Thomas COGAN'S

LETTERS TO WILBERFORCE,

ON THE DOCTRINE OF

HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY.

My.

THOMAS COGAN.

FEW particulars have as yet been presented to the public concerning the long, and somewhat varied life of THOMAS COGAN. He was born in the year 1736, at Rowell, in Northamptonshire, and was a descendant of an old and respectable family in that place, long devoted to the religious interests of the dissenters. His father was an apothecary, a man of repute in his profession, and respected for his good character and valuable qualities. To literature and books he was much inclined, and had a particular fondness for metaphysical inquiries. A few pamphlets on some of the abstruser topics of mental philosophy, published at different times, prove the extent of his researches, and the industry and zeal with which he pursued them.

With these propensities in the father, it is to be supposed that he would feel a lively interest in the education of his son. After being initiated into some of the simpler rudiments of learning, young Cogan was sent to *Kibworth*, in Leicestershire, and put un-

der the charge of Dr Aikin, the father of Mrs Barbauld, who at that time enjoyed a high reputation as a teacher. Dr Aikin had been a pupil of Doddridge, and afterwards an assistant in the Theological School of this eminent divine ; and as a scholar of refined taste, and extensive acquisitions, he sustained an elevated rank. For several years he was professor at Warrington Academy, in conjunction with Dr Enfield and Dr Taylor, and his lectures on the ancient classics and on theology have been applauded by his surviving pupils. Gilbert Wakefield, in the memoirs of his own life, has paid an elegant and feeling tribute to the talents and virtues of Dr Aikin.* Under the instructions of this able teacher and excellent man, Cogan made rapid proficiency in the branches of learning to which he applied himself, and he was ever after accustomed to speak with delight of the days he had passed at Kibworth.

At this school he remained till he was fourteen years of age, when he returned to his father's house, and continued at home during the two or three succeeding years. About this time he began to think of preparing himself for the christian ministry, and with the design of prosecuting a course of theological studies he entered the Academy at Mile End, where Dr Conder was teacher in divinity. For some reason, however, growing out of the management of the insti-

* *Memoirs of the Life of Gilbert Wakefield, B. A. formerly Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. Written by Himself. Vol. I. chap. XI.*

tution, Cogan soon became dissatisfied, and removed to Hoxton Academy.

How long he remained in this seminary, or at what time he entered the ministerial office, is not known. In the year 1759 we find him preaching in Holland, and it is supposed, that he acted as an assistant preacher with Mr Snowden at Rotterdam, who was minister of an English church founded there on the principles of the Dutch establishment.

This station, however, he did not retain long, for in 1762 he had returned to his own country, and was settled over a congregation in Southampton. What length of time he held this situation is uncertain, but it seems that difficulties arose between him and the people concerning some of his opinions, which ultimately induced him to request a dismissal. By his parents he had been taught the principles of calvinism, but his subsequent inquiries shook his faith in the higher dogmas of the Genevan creed, and he was too ingenuous to conceal his opinions, and had too high a sense of his duty not to preach what he believed to be important truth. Finding the views of his congregation, in regard to some of the abstruser points of doctrine, not in accordance with his own, and perceiving them troubled with suspicions of his heresy, he followed what he thought to be the dictates of wisdom and prudence, as well as of integrity and christian principle, in desiring to be released from the pastoral connexion.

Being thus freed from engagements at home; he went over again to Holland, where he filled the office of colleague with a clergyman in a congregation composed of English residents. At this period the symptoms of a pulmonary complaint, with which he had been long slightly affected, began to exhibit a more alarming aspect, and to admonish him of the danger to which he was exposing himself by the exertions required in public speaking. In short, so much were his apprehensions awakened by his declining health, that he felt himself compelled to abandon a profession, which he had chosen with a profound respect for its dignity, and sincere love of its duties, and which he had adorned not more by his ministerial labours and instructions, than by his exemplary deportment and purity of life.

In looking around for a new pursuit congenial with his inclination, and suited to his health, and one which should afford him an honourable calling, his thoughts were turned to the medical profession. After his mind had become settled in this choice, he commenced his new studies with a zeal and devotedness, which could hardly fail to ensure him success. He made a short visit to England, where he gratified his friends by preaching a few discourses, and then went back to Holland, and became a regularly matriculated student of medicine at the University of Leyden.

This celebrated institution was then at the height of its renown, standing at the head of the medical

schools of Europe, and Cogan knew how to estimate the advantages of his situation, and to profit by the uncommon facilities which it afforded. He completed the usual course at Leyden, and, when he took his degree, exhibited a Thesis on the *Influence of the Passions in causing and healing Diseases*. This dissertation was the basis of his future works on the Passions, which have given him considerable fame as a practical metaphysician and ethical philosopher.

Being thus qualified for entering on his profession, he commenced practice in Holland, where he seems already to have formed an extensive acquaintance, and contracted intimate friendships. He married the daughter of a wealthy merchant in Amsterdam, by the name of Groen, and established himself for a time as a practising physician in that city. Encouraged by his growing reputation, however, he went over to London, where his practice became so extensive and his labours so burdensome, that he found his health gradually impaired, and he yielded again to what he deemed the call of duty in relinquishing the active employments of his profession. In 1780 he went to Amsterdam, where he devoted himself to literary and philosophical studies, and to such employments as were suited to the state of his health, and the bias of his inclination.

During his residence in London, Dr Cogan was instrumental in establishing the Royal Humane Society, one of the most efficient schemes of benevolence,

which have been devised for the relief of suffering humanity. The institution may indeed be said to have originated with him, although it would not perhaps have been so soon carried into actual operation, had it not been forced onward by the zeal and unwearied exertions of his friend Dr Hawes. A society was formed in Amsterdam in 1767, the object of which was to restore to life those who were apparently dead from drowning. The frequent accidents in that city, where water conveyance was so common, suggested the importance of such an association, and premiums were offered for rescuing persons, who were in imminent danger of being drowned. The society was successful beyond its expectations, and statements of its proceedings and the cases of recovery were published. These were translated into English by Dr Cogan, with a view to act on the public mind in his own country, and especially to convince the friends of humanity in London of the utility of such an association in that metropolis.

These accounts first caught the attention of Dr Hawes, who applied himself to the subject with an enthusiasm and disinterestedness, which nothing could conquer. For a time he received neither sympathy nor aid from the public, but no discouragement could damp the ardour with which he was moved ; he was prodigal to profusion of every personal sacrifice of property, time, and labour. His project was ridiculed as absurd by some, and rejected as impracticable

by others. For a whole year he took the burden on himself, and offered rewards for bringing drowned persons to certain places, where means would be immediately used for their recovery. The practicability of resuscitation was thus proved by numerous examples, and his success was such as to silence every voice. After these testimonies, the force of which was not to be turned aside by ridicule, nor speculative objections, Dr Cogan and Dr Hawes agreed on a time and place at which they would assemble a certain number of their friends, and consult on the proper measures to be taken for establishing a society. The result was the formation of the Royal Humane Society in 1774; and, to give an adequate conception of the utility of this society, it is enough to state, that during the first ten years after it was formed, no less than three thousand persons in the city of London alone, were by its means rescued from a premature death.

The Reports of the Society for the first six years were drawn up by Dr Cogan, who was in no degree behind his ardent coadjutor in zeal and assiduity. He contrived instruments for taking drowned persons quickly and uninjured out of the water, and suggested various improvements in the methods of resuscitation. "Whilst he lived, Dr Cogan took a lively interest in the proceedings of the Society, and, when opportunity permitted, failed not to attend the annual meetings, where he of all others must have been grat-

ified by the procession of the persons restored to life by the Society's methods. By his will he bequeathed to his favourite institution the sum of one hundred pounds. The Society, as has been justly remarked, will be a standing monument of what may be accomplished by individual persevering exertions in the cause of humanity ; and will transmit the names of Hawes and Cogan to posterity as benefactors of the human race."* The example set by them has been followed in almost all parts of the civilized world, and humane societies formed on a similar plan now exist in many of the large cities in Europe and America.

After retiring from his profession in London, Dr Cogan lived a studious and quiet life in Holland till the French revolution, when he resolved to quit the continent and take up his final residence in England. During a part of his absence he had passed his time in travelling over Germany and the Netherlands, and had made notes of the incidents and reflections that occurred to him in his wanderings. When he returned to England he revised his journal, and published it in a work consisting of two volumes, entitled *The Rhine*. This work is praised for the ease and simplicity of its

* See a short Memoir of Dr Cogan in the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XIV, p. 1—5; 74—76. To this article I am chiefly indebted for the facts contained in the present brief notice. It is extremely meagre, but nothing more extended or full, it is believed, has come before the public. It remains for some future biographer to do justice to the memory of a man, who has claims so strong on the gratitude of *his species*, and who holds no humble rank among the wise, the *learned*, and the good.

style, and the interesting manner in which the narrative is put together.

He now took up his residence at Bath. Here his attention was turned to agriculture; he made experiments in farming, and was so successful as to gain several premiums from an Agricultural Society to which he belonged. In these pursuits it seems to have been his chief object to draw off his mind from severer studies, and relax himself by an amusement, which should be at the same time congenial with his taste, and afford him a salutary exercise of his mental and bodily powers. He preserved the same habits to the end of his life; wherever he resided he took care to be supplied with land for agricultural experiments; and when he afterwards retired to lodgings in London, he still kept a farm in the country to which he frequently resorted.

While residing at Bath he published his *Philosophical and Ethical Treatises on the Passions*. These were received with approbation, and have been several times republished. At the same place, also, the celebrated Letters to Mr Wilberforce on *Hereditary Depravity* made their first appearance. So popular was this pamphlet, that it passed speedily through several editions, and continues still to be often republished in England. It may be doubted, whether the arguments against the dark scheme of calvinism have ever been stated with more power and spirit, or in a form calculated to produce a more thorough con-

viction of the false foundation on which this system is built. The letters are written in a plain, perspicuous style, the reasoning is clear and direct, and the temper of the writer and tone of his sentiments afford an admirable illustration of the principles of benevolence, and christian love, for which he proves himself so powerful an advocate.

Next in succession were his *Theological Disquisitions*, in two volumes, embracing a view of the Jewish Dispensation, and of Christianity. These are made to harmonize with his previous *Ethical Treatises*, and are intended with them to constitute a general system of morals and religion, as manifested in the character of the Deity, the nature of man, and the truths of revelation. But his *Theological Disquisitions* contain little that is original or striking; they are diffuse in style, and abound in repetitions of the same thoughts; and although the author's benevolent spirit shines out in every part, and some judicious reflections are scattered here and there, yet these volumes must be allowed to be the least satisfactory and interesting of all his writings. Dr Cogan's last work, the *Ethical Questions*, appeared in 1817, and treats chiefly of metaphysical subjects. He published other works during his lifetime, an entire catalogue of which may be seen in the article referred to above in the *Monthly Repository*.

The author's latter years were mostly passed in London, although, as before remarked, he occasion-

ally retreated to his little farm in the country. He enjoyed his usual health, till a month before his death, when he took a sudden cold by exposure to a damp atmosphere, and was seized with an indisposition which never left him. For a week or two, however, he was able to be abroad, and went to his brother's house at Walthamstow, with a presentiment that he should never return. From that time he declined gradually, and expired on the 2d of February, 1818, in the eighty-second year of his age. His mind continued sound and active to the last ; he was cheerful and tranquil, recounted with expressions of gratitude the blessings with which his past life had been filled up, talked much of the necessity and benefits of death in the wise scheme of Providence, and declared his entire readiness to meet the will of God in submitting to the great change of death, and to resign his spirit to that mercy and goodness, which had through a life of many years protected and blessed him.

The habitual frame of mind, which he cherished on this subject, may be learned from a short paragraph, which was found in manuscript among his papers, and was intended as the concluding part of the preface to a new edition of his treatise on the Christian Dispensation. "Before this edition will see the light," says he, "it is probable that the eyes of the author will be closed in darkness. Should this be the case, the following declaration may excite some

attention to it. Its principles have afforded him much consolation during a large portion of life ; they have rendered advanced years placid and serene, and enabled him to contemplate death itself, notwithstanding its gloomy appearance, as one of the most essential blessings in the whole plan of Providence." No man could have better grounds for contemplating death with security and composure than Dr Cogan ; his life had been without reproach ; he was pious and charitable, benevolent and humane ; in thought and action he was moved by the genuine spirit of christianity ; he loved God, and praised him habitually for his goodness ; he loved man, and laboured for nothing so much as the moral improvement and happiness of his fellow-creatures.

REMARKS
ON THE
WRITINGS OF DR COGAN.

COMMUNICATED TO THE EDITOR.

THE design of Dr Cogan in the connected series of disquisitions, which he gave to the world, was, as he expresses it, “to trace the moral history of man in his pursuits, powers, and motives of action; and the means of obtaining permanent wellbeing and happiness.” He begins, very wisely, with a careful analysis of the *passions* and *affections*; from the proper exercise of which he supposes all happiness to be derived, and in the proper regulation of which, he supposes all virtue to consist.

It is to be regretted, that more attention has not been paid to this subject; to the actual constitution of the human mind, especially of its active principles, and to the various elements, that enter into the formation of a good character. Just views on these points would do much, it is certain, to correct many prevail-

ing errors, not only in morals, but in theology. Light would be thrown upon the laws of scriptural interpretation; several doctrines of the Gospel, particularly those of repentance and conversion, would receive a more clear, satisfactory, and practical explanation; many of the differences, which now divide serious and well disposed Christians, would disappear; a more candid and liberal spirit would discover itself in our treatment of one another, and a more rational and consistent, if not a warmer piety towards God. In considering the nature and sources of some of the most mischievous delusions, that have vexed the church, the confused and partial conceptions, that still prevail respecting the influence of religion on the character, and the too common habit of representing many things as the genuine offspring of benevolence and piety, which originate in reality in a perverted intellect, or a diseased state of the affections, there is certainly nothing to which we can look with so much hope and confidence as a remedy for these evils, as to the improvements which have been made, are making, and will be made, in the Philosophy of the Human Mind.

The reputation of Dr Cogan, as a metaphysician, must depend chiefly on his *Philosophical Treatise on the Passions*. In defining, classifying, and describing the passions, affections, and desires, which belong to our nature, and in accounting for their almost infinite varieties and diversities, he has discovered much

acuteness and compass of mind ; and given us probably more useful information on the subject, than can be found any where else in the same number of pages. He considers, that all our passions and affections may be resolved into *one* principle, the LOVE OF WELL-BEING ; even our aversions being no other than particular modifications of a desire founded on this love, namely, a desire of being liberated from whatever appears injurious to wellbeing. Our passions and affections he divides into two classes ; those, which owe their origin to the principle of *self-love* ; and those, which are derived from the *social principle*. Each of these classes he subdivides into two orders ; the first embracing the passions and affections in which the idea of *good* predominates, or is the exciting cause ; and the second, those in which the idea of *evil* predominates, or is the exciting cause.

The author is a decided believer in the real existence of a benevolent principle in man, distinct from self-love, and not a mere modification of it. He admits, indeed, as all must gladly admit, that much pleasure and satisfaction are felt by the person himself, who performs a benevolent action ; but this pleasure and satisfaction are observed to follow, or attend, the benevolent action, and not to precede it ; and are, therefore, to be considered rather as its *reward*, than as its *motive*. There is sufficient evidence, that a disinterested sympathy forms a part of our moral constitution ; by which the wellbeing of others

is so connected with our own, that an interest is felt and manifested in their happiness without any regard at the time to its influence on ours. It is an original law of our nature, and not the result of calculation. Another principle is excited, and made to act; and, therefore, the motive prompting us to perform a benevolent deed is by no means to be confounded with the motive prompting us to one purely selfish. It is one of the finest characteristics of our author's writings, that he takes every occasion to remark upon the derivation of our best and only permanent gratifications from the cultivation and exercise of this benevolent principle. "Who can sufficiently admire that constitution of things," he exclaims, "which has placed the supreme happiness of man in communicating happiness to others? Who can sufficiently despise the grovelling soul, whose only object is self-gratification? And who will regret, that such a soul can never possess what it covets; that it is condemned to feed upon husks alone, and to remain an eternal stranger to the luxuries of benevolence!"*

In his *Ethical Treatise on the Passions, founded on the Principles investigated in the Philosophical Treatise*, it must be admitted that Dr Cogan does not discover equal talent and discrimination; though it contains many ingenious remarks and happy illustrations, which will reward well an attentive perusal. It is the leading doctrine of this work, that all our

* *Ethical Questions*, p. 103.

passions and affections are good, and productive of good, unless *abused*, that is, bestowed upon unworthy objects, or carried to an improper extreme. The principle of *hatred*, for example, is a useful and necessary principle, so long as it is kept under a due regulation; but becomes pernicious and criminal when abused, when an aversion is entertained for that which is a real good, on account of some peculiar quality it may possess, which is unpleasant to our feelings; or, when we suffer an aversion to exceed, in any case, the limits which reason, justice, or humanity prescribes. Exemplifications of such an abuse are easily found by investigating the nature of envy, cruelty, malignity. It is by these abuses and irregularities, that those passions and affections, which were designed and adapted to be the sources and guardians of wellbeing, both in ourselves and others, often become the occasions of the most poignant misery; and, indeed, are the causes of all the manifold and aggravated sufferings, which afflict humanity, with the exception, perhaps, of some of those that result from disease and want.

Dr Cogan considers that there is no disorder, or irregularity of disposition or conduct, which may not be traced to one or more of these three causes; ignorance, the influence of present objects, and of inordinate self-love. Nay, there is a sense in which every aberration of the passions and affections may be ascribed to *ignorance*; as the strong influence

of present objects, and the power of inordinate self-love to lead the passions and affections astray, lies in their effect, first to deceive and blind the understanding, leading it to misjudge the properties of the interesting object. To guard, therefore, against these disorders and irregularities, we are provided with intellectual powers and the means of mental culture, by the aid of which we may form, or correct, our judgments as to the real properties of any object that excites our affections; and ascertain whether it *ought*, or ought *not*, to be pursued.

It is this, according to Dr Cogan, that makes man a moral agent, accountable for his actions, and capable of merit or demerit. It is a beautiful picture, which he gives us of the happiness attendant on a life of regular and confirmed virtue. "These are indications of an inward and deep respect for virtue, which may exist in the breasts of those who are prevented, by habits of depravity, from the practice of it. How congenial therefore must it be to the minds of those, who have been habituated to the practice of virtue; who feel its benignant influence in their own conduct; and who are witnesses to the peace, order, harmony, and joy, diffused according to the sphere of its influence! To the pleasures arising from the approving decisions of his judgment, from personal advantages in the course of a virtuous conduct, from the esteem of the worthy, from a heart glowing with benevolence—the man of confirmed vir-

tue adds the pleasures derived from a refined and exalted *taste*. He admires the *beauty* of right conduct. The symmetry derived from well ordered affections is far more interesting to him, than that of forms painted on the canvass, or chiselled out in marble. The voice of harmony, arising from the cheerfulness of virtuous innocence, delights his ear more than all the melodies of music. The grandeur of virtue, rising superiour to every misfortune or seduction, constitutes with him the *true sublime*; and excites in his breast the elevated emotions of admiration and delight to a much higher degree, than can be produced by the majesty of nature itself!"*

The author's treatise, entitled *Ethical Questions, or Speculations on the principal Subjects of Controversy in Moral Philosophy*, forms a volume, as its title intimates, which contains much questionable matter. By those, however, who agree with the author in his speculations, it may be thought to discover as much learning and ingenuity, as any which he has published. He denies that human nature is endowed with a *Moral Sense* to perceive moral principles, in a manner analogous to the organs of sense in the perception of external objects. All, he says, that can be ascribed to the constitution of human nature in this question, is an inherent love of wellbeing, disposing us to approve of whatever we think to be

* Ethical Treatise on the Passions. Part II. Disquisition II. Chap. II. Sec. 2.

conducive to it, and to disapprove of whatever we think injurious to it; the degree of our approbation or disapprobation being, in every instance, according to our opinion of the extent of the evil, or the malignity of the design. What is called conscience, or the moral sense, is therefore according to this writer nothing but the reason of man, employed in judging of human *conduct* with regard to its influence on well-being; supported in its decisions by some modification of love or hatred, according as the action or agent, which is the object of each particular decision, is thought to be friendly or inimical to the order, harmony, and happiness of the moral world. It is however admitted, that these decisions of the mind on moral subjects, though in all cases the result of reasoning in the first instance, become by the power of *habit* as instantaneous and direct, apparently, as those of intuition or sensation.

Our author is the open and strenuous advocate of the doctrine of *Philosophical Necessity*. He insists upon the argument, that every act of the will must have a cause out of itself; for even if we suppose the will to have a power to move itself, it must still have some inducement for every particular exertion of this power, or the action resulting from it, so far from being a moral action, would not even be a rational one. He rejects the idea of a liberty of choice among motives, as this supposes the existence of several motives at the same time, whereas, strictly

speaking, there can never be but one *motive*, namely, the inducement that actually *moves* us. Several inducements there may be, drawing different ways, but it is only the strongest inducement at the time that can prevail, and that *must* prevail. Whatever *seems* at the time, in existing circumstances and in the existing state of our feelings and whole mind, most consonant to our wellbeing, we cannot but do.

In what has been said, it is neither expected nor desired to make a single convert to the scheme of necessity. It is not at all surprising, that men should be slow to receive a doctrine, one of the legitimate inferences from which seems to be, that the character in every instance is formed *for* and not *by* the individual. Perhaps it may be found on a close and careful investigation, that *both* the necessarian and the libertarian are right in the main ; differing from each other in their verbal statements only, because accustomed to view the subject of moral agency under different aspects, and to use a different language in reporting their observations. In justice, however, to the doctrine of philosophical necessity, it ought to be observed that most of the objections urged against it, on the ground of its supposed immoral tendency, have originated in a very partial and superficial acquaintance with the system.

There is still another charge, if possible, of a still graver character against the hypothesis assumed by Dr Cogan, which he succeeds very happily in evad-

ing. It should however be observed, that it is by a way of escape not open to the calvinist, though he also is pressed with the same difficulty.

"Whoever asserts," says he, "that our doctrine leads to the horrors of *fatalism*, takes a very imperfect view of the subject. The imagination may easily extend the chain until it shall arrive at all that is great and good. Human beings have incessantly acted upon the grand principle of seeking happiness, although they have so frequently and so egregiously mistaken their way. But this is no proof that they will always mistake their way. We daily perceive that a conviction of error leads to future caution. Ignorance corrects itself, by our experience of the evils which it produces; and experience becomes the most impressive instructor. Mankind *must* at last form more consistent ideas of the nature of good, and obtain a more accurate knowledge of the ways and means to secure it, or they will continue eternal idiots. In every step they take, they are uniformly acting according to the laws of cause and effect; and although they continue to follow their own inclinations, in every act they perform, these inclinations may finally conduct them right. Repeated experience must finally correct the grossest ignorance; and repeated evils suffered in one course, will compel them to pursue another, until they shall finally have obtained wisdom to make a choice of virtue and religion as the supreme good.

"This life may be much too short for the purpose ; but the human race have an eternity before them. In a future state, similar principles may operate in a similar manner, until the whole intellectual creation shall become reclaimed and happy. Whoever has an existence, must inevitably desire his own happiness, wherever he exists ; and he will pursue it by every method in his power ; and as, wherever he may be, he will continue under the inspection of the universal Father, whose wisdom is equal to his power, and whose goodness is equal to both, the continued and extended operation of cause and effect may lead to an ultimatum devoutly to be wished, *universal happiness*."*

The author's views of *Moral Obligation* partake largely of the peculiarities of the same school. He conceives that this also may be resolved into that love of wellbeing, which is the spring of every affection, desire, and motive in man. Man is obliged, by his very nature, to pursue whatever he perceives to be conducive to his permanent wellbeing ; but his powers of discernment, unless obscured by ignorance, or perverted by the undue influence of present objects and inordinate self-love, must enable him to perceive, that duty and virtue are conducive to his permanent wellbeing ; consequently his very nature, considering him as a rational and intelligent agent actuated by a supreme desire of good, must make

* *Ethical Questions*, pp. 166, 169, 170.

the practice of duty and virtue universally obligatory. "It is *here*," he observes, "that the mighty difference between rationality and irrationality consists. The enjoyment of this good is the basis of self-interest; to diffuse it, is the soul of benevolence; every thing is fit and right, that promotes it to the greatest extent; every thing is wrong which impedes or destroys it. The intrinsic value of prudence, discretion, justice, kindness, and humanity, proceeds from their benignant influence upon happiness; the deformity of vice consists in its fiendlike malignity. It is the expectation of good, which creates submission to human laws; and it is good, which assembles every motive of self-interest, and every sentiment of love and gratitude around the throne of the GREAT SOURCE OF GOOD!"*

We notice next in order, in the series of Dr Cogan's works, his *Theological Disquisitions, or an Enquiry into those Principles of Religion, which are most influential in directing and regulating the Passions and Affections of the Mind*. His remarks on *Natural Religion* are brief and sometimes unsatisfactory; but they always breathe a noble spirit, and are highly characteristic, not less of the writer's amiable disposition, than of his peculiar philosophy. The following extract will enable one to form some idea of the manner in which he treats the subject, as well as of the conclusions to which he is conducted.

* Ethical Questions, pp. 391, 392.

“ Although to will, to plan, to execute, be equal and instantaneous, respecting the divine mind, yet in the order of our conceptions, the *Goodness* of God prompting him to create, is the first attribute that presents itself. The next is that of boundless *Knowledge*, by which he discerns effects in their causes, and every possible result from every possible energy. From such sources *Wisdom* is enabled to form its plans of extensive good, and to establish those laws, by which life shall be diffused, and its enjoyments multiplied; that *Wisdom* which has devised and constituted such a diversity of powers and properties in the material and inanimate creation; of instincts and propensities in the animal kingdom; and has endowed the human species with those intellectual and moral faculties, which are the inexhaustible sources of the most exalted and refined enjoyments. Such plans of wisdom and beneficence will be indubitably accompanied in their order, both of time and place, by a *Power* which conquers all opposition; compels apparent obstacles into its service; changes disorder into harmony; and distress into blessings; brings light out of darkness, and cherishes virtue in the midst of depravities that confound and appal !”*

In the disquisition that follows on the *Jewish Dispensation*, many very ingenious thoughts and reasonings occur; but it must be confessed that they suffer much for want of method, condensation, and point.

* *Theological Disquisitions*. Vol. I. pp. 32, 33.

It is a part of the author's system, that the object of all revelation is to produce good by the diffusion of light and knowledge, in exact proportion as the minds of men are prepared for their reception. It therefore becomes necessary for him to show, as he does, that the records of the Old Testament, and especially the history of the Jewish nation, and the laws and institutions of Moses, agree with and support this theory. There is much force and pertinency in the closing paragraph, intended as an answer to the doubts and cavils sometimes urged against the divine legation of Moses, and often with a captiousness that does no honour either to the head or heart of the objector.

“Many very important positions are established which no objections can invalidate. The selection of a particular people for a certain purpose, the accomplishment of which could not have been expected according to the ordinary course of human events; the importance of this purpose; the preference given to the descendants of Abraham, in honour of the exemplary faith and piety of their progenitor; the means used to preserve this people from the fatal contamination of idolatry; their deliverance from a state of bondage, and their establishment in a land promised to their ancestors; the superiour wisdom, strict morality, sublime piety, exemplified in every institution, honoured in every punishment, and in every reward; and the final triumph of monotheism among

this people, are facts which cannot be denied or confuted by frivolous disputes about *dæmons* and *witches*, and *magicians*, and *borrowing* and *lending* of *jewels*; or the precise degrees of inspiration in every individual agent of the divine purposes. We know that the sun exists, and we consent to be cheered by its light and splendour, without waiting till astronomers shall have explained the nature, or wiped off the disgrace of those few spots, which our ignorance has placed before his disk. When it can be proved, that the happiness of mankind is not an object worthy of the Deity; that it is not the design of the Deity to lead us, according to our nature and the extent of our faculties, from gross ignorance to knowledge and virtue; that the numerous facts recorded in the Jewish history have no relation to this object, and have contributed nothing to its promotion; then, and not till then, may the advocates for the divine legation of Moses be alarmed, by trifling objections urged respecting minuter subjects, over which distance of time, a difference in customs, manners, idioms of languages, and other circumstances have thrown a temporary veil.”*

In the remaining theological disquisition, which is upon the *Characteristic Excellencies of Christianity*, he proceeds to apply his leading principles as before; to evince the superiour lights and motives which the

* Theological Disquisitions. Vol. I. pp. 458, 459.

Gospel affords to the practice of virtue, and the preparation of the moral offspring of God for permanent felicity. According to Dr Cogan, the principal advantages, derived from the christian dispensation, relate to the views which it has given us of the parental character of God ; the benefits resulting from the mediatorial office of Christ ; the filial confidence, which constitutes the essence of christian faith, that it is adapted to inspire ; and the hopes and fears which it awakens respecting a future life. Under the head of the parental character of the Deity, we find the following remarks on the reasonableness of a belief in a *particular providence* ; which, for the importance of the subject, and the excellent spirit they breathe, must be read with interest even by those, who may not assent to all his conclusions.

“ We acknowledge that the Deity is immutable in his nature, but we must also acknowledge that he is necessarily active. His operations must be incessant, or he is not always the same. In what manner he is incessantly operative is a secret no one can disclose. Nor can we discover what particulars are included in our received axioms concerning the laws of nature, and the agencies of cause and effect. We are generally prone to confine the course of nature entirely to physical causes, or to the influence which one body is ordained to have upon another, according to certain immutable rules. But if the ever active Deity hath *not retired* from his operations, something more must

be understood. It is possible, that the permanency of physical powers may totally depend upon the permanency of his agency. Nor is it irrational to suppose, that in certain cases, where the usual course of things is not equal to the production of important events preordained, this ever active Being exerts an extraordinary energy, or a different kind of energy, according to certain moral laws of his own appointment. When God condescended to change the order of nature, or interrupt the usual influence of causes, in order to impress a conviction upon the minds of others, although it was by the infliction of judgments, the motive was always benevolent. Some essential good was to be produced, which could not otherwise have existed. May not a similar motive induce him to a similar interference, although in a more secret, and perfectly imperceptible manner, in order to assist, support, and console those who, in conformity to his commands, repose their confidence in him, that, their strength may be equal to their conflicts, and that in the hour of temptation and distress, they may not make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience?

“This subject has been briefly considered in some preliminary observations to a preceding Disquisition, to which the reader is referred.* It was there observed that our reason points out three modes by which the Divine Being may be supposed to execute his purpose; by a stated concatenation of cause and

* See *Theological Disquisitions*. Preliminary Observations.

effect, according to physical laws, destined to produce numberless beneficial effects, both in the natural and moral world, which may be equal to various purposes, both physical and moral, in the plans of his providence ; by an open and ostensible manifestation of extraordinary power, in order to impress a conviction upon the human mind, of some important facts, which human reason could not have discovered, or to alarm and terrify a sinful world ; and, thirdly, when these manifestations are not necessary or proper, may we not imagine that the Deity exerts a secret influence, by which a new and extensive series of operations may arise, which could not have existed according to the former tenour of things ; and which, had the operations been made manifest, would have been deemed *miraculous* ?

“ Many facts are upon record which evince that a conviction of this secret agency may be founded, either upon the *prediction* uttered, that certain events should take place by the instrumentality of natural causes ; or upon so remarkable a *coincidence* in their operations with the peculiar exigence of the case, as compels us to acknowledge the hand of God. Many of the plagues of Egypt illustrate the former position. The passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea ; the destruction of their enemies by the return of the mighty waters ; and the occasional supply of quails in the wilderness, illustrate the latter. The extreme violence of an eastern, or a western wind, cannot ap-

pear to us as a deviation from the laws of nature; nor the sudden and impetuous change of these winds; yet their opportune influence, and the important purposes answered by this influence, induce every one who believes in the Mosaic history, to infer that there was a miraculous interference of Providence. But the Almighty is at all times free to employ a similar agency, without admitting us into his counsels, and without our being able to trace his footsteps. This secret agency seems to be the proper object, as it is the encouragement of prayer; and although the time, manner, and degree, are totally unknown, yet devout minds may safely rely upon the promise, that they shall not seek his face in vain.

“The concealment is indubitably founded on wisdom. The laws of nature, or the operations of cause and effect, cannot be too intimately known. They are the foundation of all science, and a confidence in them is necessary to encourage and direct our pursuits. Miraculous displays of power have sometimes been employed, to convince an ignorant and unthinking world, that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. But many evils would arise, were it distinctly known in what cases, and to what a degree, the divine aids promised in the Gospel were administered to each individual christian. The *favoured* mind would, in that instance, possess the infallibility of inspiration, which might inspire it with arrogance and pride, and induce it to neglect the ordinary means of improve-

ment ; while jealousy, envy, and despair, would torment those who were less favoured ; and the free agency of man would be effectually destroyed. ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it comes, and whither it goeth ; so is every one, saith our Saviour, that is born of the Spirit.’ Whoever confidently maintains that, in any particular instance, he is influenced by the Spirit of God, should he not impose upon others, wretchedly deceives himself. For a certain knowledge of the operation would render it *miraculous*. His feelings must be fallacious, for in this department of the divine government, all the operations of God are designedly and wisely *concealed* from human knowledge. By their *fruits* alone are such influences to be inferred. These fruits are not a presumptuous confidence, but ‘love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ ”*

Respecting the benefits accruing to man from the *Merits and Sufferings of Jesus Christ*, the views of Dr Cogan are somewhat peculiar. He supposes, that the penalty incurred by man’s transgression was a total extinction of his being ; that God, however, in consideration of the perfect obedience, and voluntary sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, has been pleased to *commute* the punishment, by changing this total ex-

* Theological Disquisition on the Characteristic Excellencies of Christianity. Part I. Chap. 2.

tion of being into a temporary suspension of it in the grave ; so that we may be said literally to be indebted to Jesus Christ, not only for the *doctrine* of our immortality, but for our immortality itself. This privilege he supposes the merits and sufferings of Christ to have procured for the whole human race ; just as the uncommon faith and piety of Abraham procured peculiar privileges for his descendants.

But however great may be the privilege of being thus restored to life, he admits that it is not in itself a restoration to happiness ; it only presents us with a continued opportunity to prepare, or qualify ourselves for happiness. It is a principle with our author, from which he never departs in his reasonings, and which is as applicable to a future life as to this, that rational beings cannot possess *wellbeing*, without the love and practice of virtue, nor *complete felicity*, without the perfection of virtue and piety. Though, therefore, immortal *life* be secured to us by what *Christ* has done for us ; immortal *happiness* can only be secured by what *we* may do for ourselves, with the means and assistances which God has provided.

Christian *faith* is explained by this writer as implying that entire confidence in Jesus Christ, which is necessary that the promises and threatenings of the Gospel may have their effect on our characters. For of course these promises can have no effect on us any further than they are believed, nor be believed any further than we have confidence in the agent

employed to utter them. The following judicious observations on the kindred subjects of justification and human merit occur in this connexion.

“The terms *justified, just, justifier*; and also *righteous, righteousness, righteousness of God, &c.* which are so frequently used by the Apostle, convey, in the currency of the English language, different significations from those which are uniformly annexed to them in the original Greek. We are accustomed to consider the word to *justify*, as being synonymous with to *vindicate* from a particular accusation; and the *justifier*, as the advocate who pleads the cause of the accused. By *righteousness*, we are prone to understand the perfection of a moral character in general. But by such applications, the primitive significations of the words are placed at a considerable distance from each other; so that their natural connexion with themselves and their subject is destroyed. All these terms are derived from the same origin; and they invariably relate to a *just decision*, in a judicial process. Consequently, they are equally applicable to the *condemnation* of the guilty, and the *vindication* of the innocent, or to an honourable *acquittal* from the charges which have been brought against him.

“Nor do they exclude a *free pardon*, or *mitigation* of the legal punishment, where the charge may have been substantiated. All these may be *righteous judgments*. The first places before the eyes of the

offender and of the public, the law, the transgression, and the penalty. The other evinces that neither the offence, nor the penalty, is applicable to the accused. His innocence has been proved, and strict justice demands that he should be acquitted. In the remission of the punishment, or mitigation of the penalty of the law, the decisions of equity consist in pronouncing the offender to be guilty ; by which a very important distinction is inviolably preserved between the guilty and the innocent. The law is protected, and the offender disgraced. His demerits and his danger are publicly made known. But such a discovery cannot be a total impediment to the exercise of mercy. If it were, mercy would cease to have an existence. Wherever the detection of guilt, and immediate exposure to severe sufferings, inspire the offender with anguish and contrition, they also inspire a disposition in every benevolent mind to soften the rigours of the law, if circumstances will permit ; nor does such a mind apprehend that it will offend justice, either by the remission or the mitigation of the penalty, as prudence may dictate. By this constitution of our nature, we are rendered the guardians both of justice and of clemency. We resent the offence, but we pity the offender.

“ Nor is this right relinquished in the establishment of civil governments. A mercy seat is always placed somewhere. Provision is always made for occasional acts of grace. Nay, the most cruel tyrant claims to

himself the right of showing mercy when he pleases. Were any of his subjects to litigate this privilege, they would be in danger of suffering for the insult. In cases of this kind, all that the principles of wisdom and justice require, is, that in the mode of exercising mercy the criminal should be encouraged to reform, and not repeat his crimes; and that his fellow subjects should be discouraged from imitating his wicked example. Where penitence is sincere, and there are sanguine hopes of reformation, although the offender has not been justified according to the stricter sense of the word, mercy will freely consent that he shall, in the future, be treated as if he had been justified. His former offences shall no longer exclude him from the privileges common to inoffensive citizens.”*

The following excellent remarks on merit are founded on the same principles, and accord with the same general system.

“*Absolute* merit belongs not to the sinful children of God. Even the future, however exemplary, cannot recall the past. Life and immortality are the rewards of *moral perfection* only; and the title of *Right* is lost by a single act of disobedience. Among those who are clothed with humanity, the claim belongs to the immaculate Son of God alone. He knew no sin, and with him the Father was always well pleased. In him the merit was *absolute*.

* Ibid. Part II. Chap. 1. On the Mediatorial Office of Christ.

“*Conditional* merit consists in our complying with the terms of salvation proposed. Although a compliance be simply an act of prudence, and can lay no claim to any other kind of merit; although the reward is so infinitely superiour to the nature and effects of the act itself, yet the man who conforms to the injunction is entitled, by virtue of the promise, to the reward proposed. The terms are, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ;’ receive a dispensation which proclaims pardon to the penitent, and assures those who return to filial obedience, that they shall be entitled to all the privileges of children, by being adopted into the family of heaven. Compliance with such terms is simply an act of discretion; to reject them is the extreme of folly, and it indicates the absolute dominion of vice.

“On *comparative* merit is founded the wise determination, to reward every man according to his *comparative deserts*. By it we perceive the justice of the decree, that ‘whoever sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that sows plentifully, shall reap plentifully.’

“The importance of these distinctions is manifest, from the gross abuses committed by mistakes concerning the nature of merit and demerit. Some have been so extravagant as to conceive that particular actions, which have generally been of their own devising, are of a nature so *meritorious*, that they will be received as *substitutes* for the moral virtues; that

they contain *intrinsic* merit sufficient to compensate for every defect or imperfection; without reflecting that a continuance in vice must become a disqualification for a state of purity and perfection; and without considering that there is more absolute demerit in a single vice, in one act of disobedience to such a Parent, than there can be of merit in the most splendid virtues.

“Others again have run into the opposite extreme. In the confusion of their minds, they have declaimed against the *merit of good works* with such indiscriminate vehemence as to discourage the practice. They pray earnestly for *Holiness*, but inveigh against *Virtue* and *Morality*; without considering that Holiness can be no other than the practice of virtue from *religious motives*; and no man can *practice holiness without understanding the nature of virtue, and the extent of its ramifications.*”*

As has been intimated before, Dr Cogan discovers nothing in reason, or revelation, to preclude the *possibility*, that those who die vicious and impenitent may find correction as well as chastisement in the sufferings, which they are doomed to undergo; until their ignorance is dispelled, and their obduracy conquered, and the whole moral creation ultimately restored to knowledge, purity, and blessedness. Much of the volume is appropriated to a discussion of this subject; and whatever may be our opinion respecting the

* Ibid. Part I. Chap. 3.

general question, it is impossible not to allow that there is much justice and spirit in the following strictures upon those representations of the future, eternal, and infinite miseries of the damned, which are made to occupy so large a space in the preaching and writings of calvinists.

“As the doctrine itself represents the true God, in a character which resembles that ascribed to the heathen deities, it was not unnatural to expect, that adopting the methods practised by pagan worshippers might also render him propitious; and every subterfuge has accordingly been employed, rather than to submit to the severer penance of ‘denying all ungodliness, and every worldly lust,’ in order to escape the misery they professed to dread. Multitudes have considered the punishment of everlasting misery so disproportionate to their guilt, that the most abandoned have secretly indulged the hopes of escaping. Nature prompts every rational creature of God to trust in his mercy. Numbers will not, cannot, believe that he is so implacable as their creed has taught them. They will hope that he cannot retain his anger forever; and they are prone also to consider an escape from eternal wretchedness, as an acquittal from every degree of punishment.

“But some divines themselves are fostering such dangerous delusions. Their compassionate hearts shudder at their own principles; and they have humanely devised a prompt method of saving the most

profligate sinner from eternal wrath. Although they represent sin to be of so malignant a nature, that all the flames of hell cannot, through myriads of ages, purify the polluted soul, yet a *simple act of faith* in a crucified Saviour, at the moment of nature's dissolution, or with the terrors of death before their eyes, is sufficient to appease the wrath of God, and effect a change in the heart, to which the chastisement of ages would be incompetent ! By this single act, which is manifestly an act of terror upon which no dependence can be made, the soul becomes instantly purified, as by a charm, and is prepared for the enjoyment of the bliss reserved for the righteous in a kingdom of righteousness, equally with those who, in humble obedience to the divine commands, have been working out their own salvation with fear and trembling for a series of years, through numberless trials, afflictions, and anxieties of heart ! Nay, so omnipotent is this species of faith, in the opinion of some divines, that wretches who have been notoriously placed among the workers of iniquity for a series of years, and whose atrocious crimes have, perhaps, brought them to a premature and ignominious death, will be received by the holy Jesus, with the salutation, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!'

"Who does not perceive that such incongruities destroy each other ? That those who are most alarmed at the tremendous consequences of disbelieving

this doctrine, have invented a method of annihilating all its horrors? Sudden conversions, eagerly urged, and as eagerly complied with, and which every wicked man will thus be encouraged to expect, will not only appease the wrath of God, beyond the power of endless torments, but will answer all the purposes of habitual virtue and piety! Can those be faithful, either to their trust, or to their principles, who, after they have assiduously fenced round the holy paradise of God, with all the flames of hell, that nothing which defileth may enter, thus encourage miscreants to break through the flames, that they may place themselves at the right hand of the throne of the Most High, by one hasty act of faith?"

"Again, that very doctrine which is supposed to be necessary for the conversion of sinners, occasions great multitudes to continue in their sins. Those who maintain that every unbeliever will suffer never-ending misery, should be peculiarly cautious not to increase their number. But this dogma is one grand cause of infidelity, and exposes the unbeliever to all those irregularities which infidelity is prone to authorize. Men who are taught by the light of reason to renounce this doctrine, and yet are taught by theologians, that it is an essential article of the Christian faith, will think themselves fully justified in renouncing the whole of Christianity. The rational being who admires the beauties of the creation, and adores the benevolence which is there displayed towards all

men indiscriminately, is astonished that the very God who shows so much indulgence to the wicked, in the present state, should be represented as pouring out the vials of eternal wrath upon them in a future world, under a dispensation which is emphatically termed a *covenant of grace* ! He turns from such glad tidings of great joy with horror and indignation ; and being ignorant of the true design of christianity, he becomes a determined unbeliever. These are historical facts. They are known to exist in every country in Europe. They will increase in proportion as the minds of men become emancipated from implicit faith in their spiritual instructors, and they will continue until the Gospel shall appear to them, ‘to be more worthy of all acceptance.’

“ Finally, we must remark that the doctrine of the eternal misery of the wicked is very inimical to those devout affections, which it is our duty and our happiness to cultivate towards the God of transcendent excellence. We are commanded to ‘love the Lord our God, with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our strength, and with all our minds.’ These are glowing expressions, uttered by him who was in the bosom of his Father, and who hath revealed him unto us ; expressions which manifest how supremely he deserves our love, because he alone is supremely good. It is the attribute of essential Goodness on which the duty is founded ; it is this which renders it a most rational and a most pleasant duty. But is it

possible for those to perform the duty aright, and to the due extent of the grateful feelings, who are habituated by their creed to consider the author of their being as an object of terrour? We cannot love whom we please, and to the degree that we please, merely because we are commanded. Nor can the affection be called forth to a due extent, by a general indefinite acknowledgment that he is good. We cannot feel a warm affection for any human being, or an admiration of his character, until we are made acquainted with some extraordinary instances of his superiority; and as these abound, will our love and admiration increase.

“Thus the simple proposition, that God is good, may inspire a degree of respect, but it will not arise to the ardour of love. This affection must be called forth, and habitually cherished, by incessant manifestations of operative goodness. The more numerous, extensive, and extraordinary these, the more liberal his gifts, the more condescending his compassion, the more conspicuous his exertions for the diffusion of extensive happiness, the more shall we feel the propriety of the duty to love him with all our hearts, and with the greater facility will the duty be practised. But where munificence is limited by hypothesis to a comparative few, and infinite severity is exercised upon the multitude, without the intervention of wisdom, or power, to prevent miseries which exceed the most vigorous imagination, men may attempt to love,

and they may resolve to check feelings of an opposite character as impious, but they will not always succeed. Their religious tenets leave a deficiency somewhere, not to be expected in the character and conduct of a perfect Being, which must diminish that exalted admiration they are solicitous to entertain.

“ Moreover, should they arrive at that perfect love which casteth out fear, it is upon a contracted, selfish principle. They can be grateful alone for *personal* favours, and admire the goodness of God in nothing so much as in his partiality to themselves. They are justly astonished that *they* should be selected from the myriads who are consigned over to eternal misery ; and there is nothing to admire in this, but a sovereign act, which confounds the understanding ; and in which, as there are no traces of wisdom, there can be no marks of respectability. In a word, it is inconsistent with the nature of things, and with the very constitution of the human mind, to love such a Being with that profound veneration and ardour of devotion, which are due to the wise and good Parent of the universe.

“ We are also commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves. But does this love harmonize with the gratitude which is so strongly excited, by a perception that others will be eternally excluded from the transcendent blessings we are to enjoy ? Will not a generous heart feel an anxious wish that others, not less deserving, might also become participants ? If it

feels these emotions, it must also feel an astonishment that God should implant them in the heart of man, and not act upon so worthy a principle himself ! It must perceive, that its benevolent dispositions exceed those which we ascribe to our Maker ! If such desires are not entertained, then is the heart hardened by the system ; for it can contemplate the eternal reprobation of the millions with a phlegmatic indifference ! But historical facts innumerable inform us, that it has been rendered still more obdurate. Multitudes have enlisted under the banner of persecution ; have hated men, because they supposed them to be hated by God ; and have aspired to the honour of wielding the exterminating sword, which was to send their fellow immortals into eternal misery ! How different the sensations excited by such a creed, compared with the humble and benevolent hope of that Christian, who, while he laments that the wicked should turn away from their duty and their happiness, still rejoices that *his* God is *their* God, *his* Redeemer, will be *their* Redeemer ; and though he reflects, with concern, upon the misery they will inevitably bring upon themselves, he enjoys the exquisite consolation, that their sufferings will ultimately prove corrective of their vices. What motives for composure and resignation do these expectations afford to the sympathizing friend, to the affectionate relative, to the tender and anxious parent, amidst the disorders and depravities of those whom they love ! The mind of every

ous Christian will learn to acquiesce in the chastisements which shall prove salutary; for he knows that the severest judgments will be inflicted by wisdom and mercy *for purposes of Good.*”*

The last publication of Dr Cogan's which we shall notice, though the first in the order of time, contains his *Letters to Wilberforce on the Doctrine of Hereditary Depravity*; printed at first without the author's name, but afterwards acknowledged by him, with the declared intention of enlarging and republishing it in a collection of his works, as a part of the series, and to complete his design. As it is, it is certainly marked with more of his excellences, and with fewer of his faults, than any other of his writings. It is a most successful application of the same general principles, which we have seen running through all his philosophical, ethical, and theological speculations, to the illustration of a particular doctrine of the Gospel; or rather to the detection and confutation of a long established and pernicious error. The Treatise, to which, so far as this error is concerned, these letters are a most triumphant reply, certainly possesses high merits; but theological learning, conclusiveness of reasoning, and precision of language, are not among the number. Dr Cogan, while he pays a due respect to the virtues and piety of his distinguished opponent, proceeds with great seriousness, earnestness, and at times with great eloquence to prove, that the positions

* Ibid. Part III. On the Probability of Universal Salvation.

which he has taken, respecting original sin, are wholly untenable ; absolutely irreconcilable with the Scriptures ; with our conceptions of God ; with facts ; with the foundation of all moral distinctions ; and with the constitution of the human mind.

This tract may be recommended with a more entire satisfaction, because, in addition to the complete success of the argument, an excellent spirit pervades it ; and because of the serious and religious direction which it gives to our thoughts. It is, moreover, upon a subject on which it is more important, that a man should have clear and correct ideas, than upon any other in the whole compass of speculative theology. There is scarcely an error which now exists, or ever has existed in the church, that may not be traced to some misapprehension of this subject, or to some supposed inference from it ; that has not been held either as necessary to it, or as supported by it. Destroy this unaccountable delusion, which has possessed and still possesses so many minds, respecting the moral nature of man, and the moral condition into which he is born, and what a mass of absurd rites, and not less absurd opinions, which the credulity of the superstitious or the craft of the designing has imposed on the christian world, would be left without foundation or apology ?

In remarking, generally, on Dr Cogan's merits as a writer and reasoner, it must be admitted, that his want of a lucid and happy arrangement, his perpetual

petitions, and his vagueness and inaccuracy of expression, often indicating vagueness and inaccuracy of thought, afford frequent and serious ground of complaint to the reader. He likewise indulges his fondness for the analytical mode of reasoning to an extreme; treating of the faculties and phenomena of mind, not as they actually exist and operate, but disjointedly and abstractedly. The consequence of which often is, that he leaves his readers with as confused and indistinct a conception of the mind itself, and its various operations, as a man would have of a watch, who had never seen one after it had been put together, but had only seen, and perhaps heard a learned lecture upon the several parts of the machinery, after it had been taken to pieces. It is but just, however, to observe, that our author's passion for analysis and details has prevented his reasonings from being much affected by his general biasses in favour of the Hartleian school; which might otherwise have weakened not a little the confidence, that a large proportion of his readers may now safely repose in his conclusions.

After all, however, it is the fine moral effect of his writings, which constitutes their highest recommendation. It is the harmony which they prove to exist between knowledge and virtue, between reason and faith, between perfect obedience and perfect happiness, that stamps upon them an unspeakable value and makes it impossible for any one to read them without being made better. After being taught

intimate and necessary connexion of our passions and affections with our wellbeing, it is impossible that we should not attend more to their due regulation ; after being shown, that in the nature of things complacency and delight must attend the exercise of the benevolent dispositions, and pain and misery the selfish and malevolent, it is impossible that we should not be more inclined to the former ; after being convinced, that every event, even the most afflictive and inexplicable, tends to good, that all is from God and for good to all, it is impossible that we should not be more cheerfully acquiescent in the dispensations of Infinite Wisdom ; after considering the admirable adaptation of all our circumstances in this life to our moral condition and improvement, and the whole history of revelation to the onward march of the human mind, it is impossible not to discern in this the hand of God ; and being persuaded that it is the RELIGION OF JESUS, which alone can excite and employ our best affections, and furnish an adequate object to our highest and purest hopes and expectations, it is to THAT we shall look for all real and permanent felicity here, and hereafter.

J. W.



COGAN'S
LETTERS TO WILBERFORCE,
ON THE DOCTRINE OF
TOTAL DEPRAVITY.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE writer of the following Letters having studied nature and genius of christianity, for his own con- on and improvement, has long been satisfied with ideas of it, as appeared to him equally true and nal; and he never indulged a thought of becoming a theological controversialist, until the great popularity of Mr Wilberforce's *Practical View of the reigning Religious Systems of professed Christians*, kindled his curiosity. He naturally expected something new and forcible from so distinguished an author. He was greatly disappointed; and the perusal of that celebrated work, instead of producing the conviction which its author so ardently desires to be the result, suggested to his mind with increased force, numerous objections which had finally induced him to strike out of his creed a tenet in which he had been educated; and was taught to believe of the high importance.

It might have been expected that the prevalence of good sense, in the present day, and more accurate ideas of the nature of justice in general, and of the divine benignity in particular, would have committed such a doctrine as that of hereditary guilt, to the oblivion it deserves. But as it has met with an eloquent defender in the person of Mr Wilberforce, the error may acquire new strength to the injury of genuine christianity. That gentleman is zealous in support of the tenet, because he considers it as the foundation of all religion, and peculiarly of the christian dispensation ; his opponent is equally zealous to confute it, from a conviction that true christianity cannot prevail until this so great a stumblingblock, and some others of which it is the basis, shall be removed. The arguments on both sides are now before the public, and it is for them to decide concerning the preponderancy of evidence.

LETTERS

ON

TOTAL DEPRAVITY.

LETTER I.

Confidence with which the Calvinistic Tenet of Depravity is usually asserted. False Modes of Reasoning by which it is supported. Leads to Skepticism. Sanctions absurd and impossible Doctrines. To be believed only by rejecting the Dictates of the Understanding. Harmony between Reason and Scripture.

SIR,

It must afford satisfaction to every lover of virtue and religion, to see a person in your elevated station step forth from amidst the luxury, dissipation, ambition, and irreligion that surround him, boldly vindicate the cause which he deems to be of God, and enter his protest against those who appear to be a disgrace to the religion they profess. The purity of your motives, the fervour of your zeal, and your elegant classic taste, unite to inspire you with a captivating

and impressive eloquence ; and it is the sincere wish of the writer of these Letters, that it may be instrumental in exciting the minds of the indolent and lukewarm, to pay more attention to the things which relate to their most important interests. In the midst of these excellences, every attentive reader must discern essential defects, which will inevitably render your work much less acceptable and useful than you ardently desire. He will perceive that the whole of your diffuse, but eloquent expostulation, is uniformly founded upon very bold assumptions. You appear so eager to enforce your favourite doctrines upon the minds and consciences of your readers, that you have not given yourself sufficient leisure to inform us upon what principles you have embraced them ; nor have you taken sufficient pains to prove that the reception of those particular doctrines of hereditary depravity, the atonement of Christ, and the influence of the Spirit, according to your ideas of them, is peculiarly favourable to vital religion ; or the rejection of them the grand cause of its decline. Yet of such infinite moment do you consider these doctrines, that they are every thing to you, and you are *totus in illis*. Not only is the disbelief of them the *cause* of depravity of manners, but it is an *indication* of this depravity ; virtuous conduct is *suspicious*, unless it be the result of your principles ; you enter a solemn protest against sincerity itself, if it be not connected with the belief of them ; and the cordial reception of chris-

tianity, as a wise and beneficent dispensation from God, will convey no higher title than that of a *nominal* christian. Such contracted notions could not have been expected, Sir, from a person of your education and accomplishments ; they properly belong to the most illiterate proselytes of the tabernacle. Do you not perceive that the censorious temper you have thus indulged, must be extremely offensive to him who has enjoined, “ judge not, that ye be not judged ? ”—whose Apostles, in the spirit of their master, admonish not to speak evil of another ; and with a well adapted degree of indignation, inquire, “ who art thou that judgest another ? to his own master he standeth or falleth ? ” Is not this conduct inverting the criterion of our Saviour, teaching us, not to judge of the tree from the fruit ; but of the fruit from the tree ; and condemning all as of a noxious quality, that is not gathered from your favourite vineyard ? Are you not sensible that it is peculiarly inconsistent in one who endeavours, throughout the whole of his animated performance, to inculcate christian humility, and the deepest self-abasement ? Is it not an absurd union of the penitent publican’s humiliation, with the pride of the pharisee ? While you recommend the language of the former, “ Lord be merciful to me, a sinner ! ” you exclaim, in the spirit of the latter, to those whose religious opinions do not reach your standard, “ stand off from me, for I am holier than thou.” I am a *real*, thou art but a *nominal* christian !

Sentiments like these, which pervade your work, ought at least to have been founded on the clearest proofs, not only that the doctrines which you maintain, are of a truth from God ; but that he has decidedly enjoined the belief of them, as essential to the character of a christian. You ought also to have fully demonstrated, either that those who refuse from *principle* to admit these doctrines, are more immoral in their conduct, than those of your own persuasion, who frequently receive them *implicitly* ; or, that their opinions contain within themselves the seeds of immorality. You should have proved that their belief in the humanity of Christ, teaches them to reject both his example and his precepts ; that no one can acceptably apply to the throne of grace, for the pardon of his sins, unless he has exactly the same ideas with yourself, concerning the mode in which this pardon will be imparted ; that no one can become sanctified, without embracing your particular opinion concerning the nature of divine influences ; and that every man must continue dead in trespasses and sins, unless he repent of those committed before he was born. You lament that the doctrines for which you are so zealous an advocate, have lost much of their power over those who embrace them. If you had inquired into the cause of this indifference, you might perhaps have discovered the cause of that general depravity you bewail, without stigmatizing a class of people, of whom, as it clearly appears, you are totally ignorant ;

or indulging in the reprehension of opinions which you have not refuted. The professors of the high Calvinistic tenets have frequently been accused of an illiberal and censorious spirit; it would have been peculiarly exemplary, in a person of your talents and your influence, not to have patronised the disposition, or given it so great a sanction by your own conduct. It might at least have been expected, that the severe sentence from your tribunal would have been preceded by the full detection of dangerous errors, or particular criminality of behaviour, in the party you condemn.

You have not pursued this line of conduct. The doctrines of the atonement and influence of the Spirit are introduced and enlarged upon with all the confidence attendant upon implicit faith. Not an argument is brought forward in support of these doctrines, though you deem it so fatal to deny them. You have indeed made some cursory observations in proof of hereditary depravity; but these are by no means adequate to the importance you ascribe to that tenet, which you represent as lying at the root of all religion, and still more, as being eminently the basis and groundwork of true christianity. Surely, Sir, a tenet which you deem so peculiarly important, the principles of which pervade your whole system of religion, should have been established by all the force of reason, so that scarcely a doubt could remain, before you enforce it, as of the utmost moment, with all the powers of your eloquence.

After giving a very lively and very just portrait of the vices and depravities with which mankind have been chargeable in every age and nation, even under circumstances the most advantageous to virtue and religion, you inquire, "How, can we account for the contrast between the *actual state* of man, and that for which, from a consideration of his *natural powers*, he seems to have been originally calculated? How on any principles of common reasoning, can we account for it, but by conceiving that man, since he came out of the hands of his Creator, has contracted a taint; and that the venom of this subtle poison has been communicated throughout the race of Adam, every where exhibiting *incontrovertible* marks of its fatal malignity?" You proceed to trace the progress of depravity, in a manner perfectly unexceptionable, and then resume the query, "How can this be accounted for on any other supposition, than that of some original taint, some radical principle of corruption? All other solutions are unsatisfactory, whilst the potent cause which has been assigned does abundantly, and can alone sufficiently, account for the effect." You proceed to assert, "that the corruption of human nature is proved by the same mode of reasoning as has been deemed conclusive in establishing the existence, and ascertaining the laws of the *atmosphere* of gravitation; that the doctrine rests upon the same solid basis as the sublime philosophy

not a speculation

though, perhaps, an ingenious theory, but the sure result of large and actual experiment, deduced from incontestible facts, and still more fully approving its truth by harmonizing with the several parts, and accounting for the various phenomena, jarring otherwise and inexplicable, of the great system of the universe."

There never was, perhaps, a more singular instance of bewildered and bewildering sophistry, than that contained in the above paragraph. You begin with modestly forming a conjecture ; you *conceive*, from the contrast between the *actual* state of man, and that for which he *seems* to have been originally intended, that man, since he came out of the hands of his Creator, has contracted a taint ; and that, as you express it in another place, not slightly and superficially, but radically, and to the very core. But *crescit eundo* ; having thus formed an humble conjecture, you become immediately certain of its truth ; for you assert that this subtle poison exhibits every where *incontestible* marks of its malignity. Advanced thus far you grow still bolder, for you positively affirm, that this potent cause assigned *can alone* sufficiently account for the effect ; and immediately proceeding to raise what was at first simply a modest and diffident conception to an equality with strict demonstration, you attempt to place it upon a basis of equal firmness with the discoveries of the immortal Newton. In the impetuosity of your resolution of the diffi-

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though, perhaps, an ingenious theory, but the sure result of large and actual experiment, deduced from incontestible facts, and still more fully approving its truth by harmonizing with the several parts, and accounting for the various phenomena, jarring otherwise and inexplicable, of the great system of the universe."

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culty with the *facts* which gave rise to the difficulty ; and, dexterously blending the degeneracy of man with the cause you assign, you precipitately conclude, that whoever admits the former, must admit the latter ? Your assertion, that there *can be* no other cause, is extremely bold ; it necessarily implies either that, if *you* cannot find out any other solution, no one can ; or that, because it has not been discovered to your satisfaction already, it never can be. Positions as inadmissible as they are inconsistent with that tone of diffidence, with which you introduce the subject.

Permit me, Sir, to observe, that if the hypothesis of that great philosopher had not been better founded than the one you propose, it would long ago have been buried in oblivion ; unless it had been sanctioned by established creeds, or supported by the dread of disbelieving it. Sir Isaac observed one body to fall towards another. This he discovered, by subsequent observations and experiments, to be a principle common to all bodies ; and he called it gravitation. The principle being obtained, he investigated its laws, until, by experiments, observations, and inferences, he found himself able to explain every leading phenomenon of nature by it ; as you express it, approving the truth of his theory by its harmonizing with the several parts, and accounting for the various phenomena, jarring otherwise and inexplicable, of the great system of the universe. But where is the parallel ? Yours is simply a *conjecture* to explain a

seeming phenomenon. You assert that it cannot be resolved in any other way, and triumph in a complete demonstration of the point in question ! Is this Newtonian ? Again, the hypothesis of the philosopher contradicts no one principle of natural reason ; it is not attended with consequences, which reflect dishonour upon any of the divine attributes. Your hypothesis harmonizes nothing ; it contradicts the first principles of reason, plunges the mind into much greater difficulties than those which it attempts to solve, and leads to consequences so absurd and impious, that every prudent man will rather sit down in perfect ignorance, leaving the phenomena unexplained, than venture to admit it.

Excepting we admit strong expressions and positive assertions in the place of argument, all that you have advanced proves nothing more, than that the human mind is very capable of becoming depraved ; that the will and affections may, and frequently do, take a pernicious turn ; that perverse inclinations and atrocious conduct may become habitual in the individual, until every good principle shall seem to be extinguished ; that these may be, and frequently are, rendered contagious by the force of evil example, or in consequence of that sympathy in our natures which disposes to imitation, whether the model be good or evil, until the accumulation of vice and profaneness shall exceed all calculation, or even the power of reform. This seems to have been the state

of the antediluvian world, when all "flesh had corrupted his way on the earth," so that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth." The mind once perverted may be rendered capable of every excess; and an assemblage of perverted minds may operate like a pestilence. But as a physical pestilence arises from putrid miasmata, or noxious changes, which incidentally take place in bodies originally free from noxious qualities, why may not a moral pestilence be communicated to minds originally pure, free from any original taint, or inherent hereditary disposition to sin?

To this very superficial and illogical mode of reasoning, you have subjoined a number of scriptural passages, some of which, as has been judiciously remarked, cannot be admitted in evidence;* and the others amount to no more than strong representations and pathetic lamentations of human degeneracy, without pretending to ascribe it to the cause you assign.

A full confidence in your demonstration has inspired you with courage to state a very formidable objection in all its force. You represent some bold objector as pleading, "Whatever I am, I am what my Creator made me. I inherit a nature, you yourself confess, depraved and prone to evil; how then

* See a Review of Mr Wilberforce's Treatise, by the Rev. Thomas Belsham.

can I withstand the temptations to sin by which I am environed? If this plea cannot establish my innocence, it must excuse, at least attenuate my guilt. Frail and weak as I am, a being of infinite justice and goodness will never try me by a rule, which, however equitable in the case of creatures of a higher nature, is altogether disproportionate to mine."

As this potent objection is so fairly stated, it was natural to expect that you had discovered some new mode of confutation that you possessed some reserve of arguments that should stagger the bold objector himself, if not demonstrate the fallacy of his reasoning to others; but your answer is so evasive and unsatisfactory, that he will certainly retain all his boldness; and probably his confidence in the force of his objection will be increased. Nay, you have exhibited a melancholy specimen of the subterfuges, to which an ingenious and ingenuous mind will have recourse, in order to weaken the force of the strongest arguments against a favourite hypothesis. To submit your mode of reasoning to a critical examination, and confute your positions step by step, would be a prolix, though a very easy employment. A few observations will suffice.

You first place this objection in the mouth of a skeptic, and confess, that "although it may not be difficult to expose the futility of his reasoning, you should almost despair of satisfying him of the soundness of your own." Your leading argument with

him would be to show, that as "his pre-conceptions concerning the conduct of the Supreme Being had been in fact contradicted, particularly by the existence at all of natural or moral evil ; and thus proved erroneous in one instance, why may they not be so likewise in another ?" But as you could only expect to silence, not to convince him by this query, you would "attempt to draw him off from those dark and slippery regions, and contend with him on sure grounds." Instead of giving a direct answer to the objection, your plan is to take the "*high priori road*," to prove the truth and importance of the christian religion, and then to enforce the necessity of submitting reason and judgment to whatever may be taught in the sacred writings concerning this and every other point in dispute. In consequence of this mode, you would urge upon him the following contrarieties ; "the justice and goodness of the Supreme Being ; the natural depravity of man—but that this natural depravity shall never be admitted as an excuse for sin ; and that neither our sins, nor the dreadful consequences of them, are to be chargeable upon God." You strenuously inculcate "that this corruption and weakness will not be admitted as lowering the demands of divine justice, and in some degree palliating our transgressions of the law of God." And thus is the skeptic completely refuted. To the christian it is recommended to silence his doubts, by the consideration that if our natural condition be depraved and weak,

our temptations numerous, and our Almighty Judge infinitely holy, yet that the offers to penitent sinners of pardon, and grace, and strength, are universal and unlimited.* You acknowledge, however, that there are difficulties attending the subject above and beyond our comprehension ; and you attempt to soften this acknowledged truth, by observing that there is scarcely an object around us, that does not afford endless matter of doubt and argument. The meanest reptile which crawls on the earth, nay, every herb and flower which we behold, baffles the imbecility of our limited inquiries.

It is very apparent from the above concise, but faithful statement of your mode of treating the subject, that the objection itself is insurmountable by

* This species of indemnification, you hold out to the penitent christian, is a kind of confession, that those who are necessitated to remain impenitent, have a right to claim it also ; or at least that they are treated with a severity which approaches to injustice ; unless you suppose that no injustice can be committed to the non-elect, as the bigotted Catholic maintains that no faith is to be kept with heretics. The terms *unlimited* and *universal*, inspire, at first glance, an idea worthy of Divinity ; but being systematically interpreted, they become both limited and partial. They can only refer to the number and magnitude of sins that have been committed in an unconverted state, and to the aid promised to the few who have been converted by the Spirit of God. Thus what you call *grace*, those who are without the sphere of its influence will inevitably call *partiality* ; and the more universal and unlimited the pardon granted to chosen favourites, the more striking will the contrast appear to those who are doomed to remain under the burden of Adam's sins, as well as their own.

any powers of human reason, and therefore that an absolute *veto* must be put upon these reasoning powers; nay, you deem it "an awful and affecting spectacle to see men thus busying themselves in these vain speculations of an arrogant curiosity, and trifling with their dearest, their everlasting interests."

How is it possible, my good Sir, for a man of your sense to argue so superficially and so inconsistently? To consider a question upon which so much depends, as a vain speculation of arrogant curiosity, and trifling with our dearest interests? You have placed the doctrine of an hereditary taint at the foundation of all religion; you render the belief of it of equal importance with the belief of christianity itself; and yet you treat it as a vain speculation! Others strongly suspect, that it is neither scriptural nor rational, and they are convinced that the moral attributes of Divinity are deeply concerned in the contest; to make inquiry into its truth, therefore, cannot proceed from arrogant curiosity, nor can it be trifling with their dearest interests. It is this interest, Sir, that warmly induces them to search after the truth, as it is indeed in Jesus, that they may not rashly receive for doctrines the commandments of men. Since the Deity has endued our minds with discriminating powers, he not only permits, but requires their exertion upon subjects most worthy of them. Therefore, unterrified with the awfulness of the spectacle, we shall proceed to examine the validity of your argu-

ments in opposition to the formidable objection that has been stated.

It might be asserted, that your first and leading argument, if it were admitted, would prove too much ; that it opens the door for an unlimited extent of evil ; and, carried to its excess, would leave it indifferent to the wretched inhabitants of the universe, whether a being, *nominally* beneficent, or *nominally* malevolent, presided over their lot. Your objector will, therefore, claim a right to urge, that there must be some limitation of this evil under the empire of a Being essentially good, or the conduct of both would be exactly similar. He will suggest, that the existence of evil, both natural and moral, to a certain extent, may be an indispensable law in the constitution of limited and imperfect beings ; that natural evil may become beneficial to the sufferer himself, and that the temporary permission of both may be productive of good to a much greater degree than could be obtained without it. He will advance, that the greatest sufferings that have been inflicted cannot be deemed unjust, when they have not been inflicted beyond the claims or deserts of the sufferer, and where a power of indemnification is reserved in the hands of the Almighty. He will tell you, that your position represents the divine conduct in the admission of evil, to be arbitrary and unlimited. It proposes no other rule of action than the *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas*. It renders human beings natively vile and wretched ;

it represents vindictive justice as punishing; to the utmost extent of severity, this inevitable cast of character, without a ray of hope or power of alleviation. He will remind you, that although it is not inconsistent with the character of a wise and good parent to inflict a certain degree of suffering upon his offspring, yet no wise and good parent will render them completely miserable. He may administer a bitter potion, and retain his reputation, but he cannot administer poison. His right to correct the faults of character or of conduct observable in a child, by severe chastisement, will convey no title to render the whole of his existence a curse on accession of infirmities, which could not have been avoided.

The other mode you recommend, that of proving the truth and importance of the christian religion, and then insisting on the necessity of receiving this, and other peculiar doctrines, as an essential part of the christian's creed, does not promise greater success. Your objector dares to reason farther than yourself; and it will be difficult to call forth all his reasoning powers till you have gained this happy point of conviction, and then check and prohibit their future operations. He will expect, that the evidences of the *truth* of christianity shall be succeeded by the evidence of its *excellence*; and when he finds a number of doctrines proposed to him, inconsistent with that reason you have permitted him to exercise, he will feel himself disconcerted and embarrassed. He

will examine the nature of these doctrines ; if he discover them to be inconsistent with the attributes of Deity, while he still believes them essential to christianity, there is great danger of his rejecting christianity itself. He will argue, that although the force of testimony be strongly in favour of the existence, character, mission, resurrection of Jesus, the internal evidence is so directly contrary to the honourable ideas we ought to entertain of the Divinity ; the doctrines it inculcates are so revolting, that my reason teaches me to withhold my assent. I had rather believe human testimony to be deceitful, however strongly supported, than I will believe the contradictions, you enforce upon me. If, on the contrary, he should suspect that these doctrines are not of God, and should find upon inquiry, that they are the mere inventions of men, who have given an artificial importance to their crude conceptions, and guarded, with all the terrors of a gloomy imagination, sentiments which cannot bear the light of reason, he may remain a sincere believer in christianity.

These, Sir, are not mere speculative probabilities ; each process has been frequently repeated. Inquisitive students in theology have, in numerous instances, either relinquished the doctrines you deem peculiar to christianity, or they have relinquished christianity altogether. Admitting that the atrocities lately committed in a neighbouring nation proceed entirely from infidelity, it may be fairly concluded, that this infi-

delity is to be ascribed to the absurdities of their national creed. These they have been taught from their infancy to venerate as the essential doctrines of christianity ; but as soon as reason began to dawn, not being accustomed to view the religion of Jesus through any other medium, and totally unable to discriminate truth from error, they have rejected the whole. May we not also add, that the unworthy conceptions of Deity, which the professors of so bigotted a religion must inevitably entertain, the terrific representations of the divine character, the trifling and ridiculous methods enjoined to appease his wrath and obtain his favour, have contributed no small share to the spread of atheism. Vain philosophy has hastily concluded, that to banish such a Being from the mind was doing service to humanity ; and the populace naturally became very indifferent about his existence. In like manner may we attribute much of the incredulity discoverable among protestants, to the exceptionable tenets still remaining in the creeds and confessions of churches which call themselves reformed. To the thoughtless and indifferent they serve as a pretext, while they disgust the considerate, and induce them rashly to exclaim, If this be your christianity, it cannot be from above.

On the other hand, there are also many instances of persons in whom a religious temper and the power of discrimination are happily united, and who know how to separate the chaff from the wheat. There

are many who have been converted to the belief of a gospel, purged of its impurities, who thought it not worthy of credit in its impure state. There are many others who were educated after the strictest sect of our religion, or in the doctrines of calvinism, who have been able, upon the closest examination, to separate truth from error, the word of God from the additions, false conceptions, and impositions of men ; whose faith in the truth and importance of christianity has been confirmed, by discovering that tenets the most objectionable, *were not* christianity. These, Sir, have joyfully stopped at the half-way house you have mentioned with contempt. They find it pleasantly situated between the dreary and barren wastes of infidelity, on the one hand, and the gloomy regions of false theology on the other. Here they meet with rationality in amity with religion ; they rejoice in a station where the mind can indulge hope and confidence in its God, without the injunction of sacrificing their reason ; and, Sir, without flattery, they would feel themselves highly gratified were you to join the society. One circumstance renders them peculiarly worthy of your notice ; the ablest defenders of Christianity are to be found in this very class, to which you have been reluctant to give the full title of Christians. Had it not been for their labours, the absurdities of systems like yours would have completely banished religion from among us, and have deluged this country also with the torrents of infidelity. They have

long stood in the breach, and fought your battles, though, as it appears, without receiving the puny reward of "honourable mention."

It is easy to perceive from another observation you make, that your extreme embarrassment, respecting this acknowledged difficulty, has led you to blend and confound things *inexplicable* with things *contradictory*; ideas perfectly distinct. "There is scarcely an object around us," you say, "that does not afford endless matter of doubt and argument. The meanest reptile that crawls upon the earth, nay, every herb and flower which we behold, baffles the imbecility of our limited inquiries." It is readily acknowledged, that we cannot comprehend many things respecting these. We know not what constitutes animal or vegetable life, whence the powers and properties of each class, or what occasions the diversities they possess. But we know that this life, its laws, its diversities, its final cause,—the diffusion of enjoyment,—manifest the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the great Author of life. When it can be shown, that God created the meanest reptile, either with a determination to render it miserable, or with a prescience of its misery; when it can be proved, that the present race of reptiles receive disgrace, and become heirs of endless misery, for some misconduct of their parent reptile, the cases will become parallel. Then also will wisdom and goodness vanish from our sight, and power alone, arbitrary and tyrannical, be left for our

contemplation. Then also will those, who should embrace the extravagant hypothesis, find themselves embarrassed in inexplicable difficulties, in attempting to reconcile palpable contradictions.

Permit me further to observe, as no unimportant addition to the above, that unless you relinquish your argument, you will be compelled to increase the number of articles in your faith ; for your mode of reasoning is equally applicable to the vindication of some doctrines which you deny ; and these also must be received, unless you acknowledge its futility respecting those you admit. How would you be able to confute the doctrine of transubstantiation upon your principles, in a controversy with a Roman Catholic ? He asserts most positively, that the doctrine is taught in the sacred Scriptures ; holds its belief necessary to salvation ; terms those mere nominal christians who deny it ; and laments the degeneracy of the times in which such an important truth is visibly upon the decline. You are now the bold objector ; you advance, that the expressions in Scripture require no such interpretation, and that the doctrine is absurd in itself. He concedes, that considerable difficulties surround it, and that the objection cannot be satisfactorily answered by a direct appeal to reason. He resolves to draw you off from these dark and slippery regions, and contend with you on sure grounds. Supposing you to be a skeptic, he will commence by proving the truth of the christian religion ; if you

acknowledge the Scriptures, he will charge you with inconsistency and irreligion in not believing all that the Scriptures contain. The expressions, he urges, are absolute ; *this is my body broken for you ; this cup is my blood*. You are not to oppose the impertinence of your reason, or the imbecility of your inquiries, to the express declarations of Christ.

Should you yield to the force of his argument, an *Anthropomorphite* presents himself. He tells you, that passages innumerable prove, beyond dispute, that the Supreme Being has bodily organs ; urges that the Scriptures repeatedly mention the hands of the Lord, the eyes of the Lord ; that they speak of the breath of his nostrils, of his voice, and declare that the earth is literally his footstool. You allege, that these are merely figurative expressions. He contradicts the assertion. You maintain, that his doctrine militates against the spirituality of the divine nature. He admits this spirituality, but he will not relinquish his tenet. He allows the subject to be difficult, attempts to soften the difficulty by suggesting that every reptile, and every flower baffles the imbecility of our inquiries ; that there is scarcely an object that does not afford endless matter for doubt and argument ; and he believes in the pure spirituality of God, and in the doctrine of the Anthropomorphites.

A third appears, who also professes to be a firm believer in christianity, and to receive the doctrines as he finds them, without venturing to consult the

imbecility of his own reason. He maintains that the true object of Christ's mission, was to disseminate strife and hatred through the world. You are surprised and indignant at such a charge being brought against a religion, which proclaims peace on earth, and good will towards men ; against the doctrine of the meek and humble Jesus, who pronounced, Blessed are the peace makers, and whose example was such an unequalled pattern of patience, forbearance, and forgiveness ! Your opponent tells you, these are fallacious notions ; you are even warned not to be deceived by them, for Christ himself admonishes you, " think not that I am come to send peace on earth, I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." It is in vain that you attempt to qualify and explain ; this man also, who has built his system upon particular passages, mistaking strong expressions for literal import, insists upon your believing it as a revealed truth, and avers that the very object of Christ's mission was to excite animosities. Can you possibly reject his principles with the indignation they deserve, without perceiving that your mode of reasoning leads to regions dark and slippery in the extreme ? Such are the embarrassments into which your manner of defending a doctrine, not more free from exceptions than any of the preceding, necessarily precipitates you.

However respectful it may appear to the divine oracles, the method you propose leaves the mind still in doubt what these oracles may contain. Amidst the multiplicity of opinions, which present themselves according to the different ideas annexed to various passages of Scripture, it entirely destroys the power of selection; and it necessarily introduces such a confusion of sentiment, as has afforded too good an apology for the interference of spiritual guides, who have assumed the office of composing creeds and confessions for the multitude, and attempted to enforce the unity of the faith in the bonds of peace, by all the terrours of civil authority, and all the anathemas of religion. It is thus that the majority of christian professors have become supple and credulous; they bow before creeds established by law, until they consider every doubt to be a sin, and every opposition to the established faith as an act of profaneness and impiety. But the device being purely human, is necessarily imperfect. Truth, immutable truth, is according to this plan made to vary with the region in which particular tenets have gained the ascendancy; and that which is the true orthodox faith in one country, without which no man can possibly be saved, becomes a damnable heresy in another.

Have you never considered it, Sir, as highly improbable, that the Deity should have suffered the evidence for the historical truth of christianity to be so extremely powerful and convincing, that no court

of judicature has ever required stronger proofs for the establishment of facts in a civil process, and yet that this perspicuity of evidence should cease, the instant we apply ourselves to inquire what are the fundamental doctrines of christianity? Is it not singular, that the moment we are admitted within the veil, where it was natural to expect all would be bright and glorious; is it not singular, that doubts and difficulties and mysteries should present themselves to distract and torment the mind; and that a prohibition should be issued, no longer to use that very reason which conducted us thither? Is it possible that the conduct of Providence should be so inconsistent with itself? If not, then may we safely conclude that those alone deserve to be considered as the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, which are as plain and conspicuous as the facts which establish the credibility of the Gospel; those in which all christians must agree; and we may safely conclude, that difficulties arise precisely at the points where doctrines are of less importance, or entirely the false conceptions of fallible men.

But the attempt you make to check ratiocination, or to destroy its authority in matters of religion, is vain and impotent. It is in itself a species of *felo de se*; for it can only be made by an effort of reason. Sentiments the most absurd, positions the most extravagant, can only be reconciled to any mind, because, in some point of view or other, it appears rational to admit them. The man who insists the most strenu-

ously upon faith, to the disparagement of human reason, thinks that he enforces the injunction upon rational principles. The argument is concise. God is wiser than man, it is therefore vain and presumptuous for man to oppose the imbecility of his reason to the revelation of God. If synods and councils draw up confessions of faith for the multitude, and prohibit the perusal of the volumes from which they profess to have taken them, the argument is, the populace are not able to judge for themselves, and they will infallibly run into destructive errors; and the populace acquiesce, because they infer that their teachers, from the superiour advantages they enjoy, must know much better than themselves. Thus all may be resolved into the inductions of the reasoning faculty, however erroneous.

On the other hand, christians of a different description acknowledge, that the word of God ought to be implicitly received; but they think it incumbent upon them to use their reason, in a careful inquiry, What is the word of God? Propositions of the most extravagant nature, opinions diametrically opposite to each other, put in their claim. It is impossible to admit them all, how then are they to be distinguished? Reason, and reason alone, must be the guide. When a doctrine is proposed to them which evidently contradicts first principles universally admitted, they reject it. Their argument is the following; it is infinitely more natural to suspect that a wrong interpre-

tation is given, by weak and fallible men to those scriptural expressions, which are thought to contain the sentiment enforced, than that it should be in reality the word of God. Since scripture phraseology is so extremely various, that every rash and inconsiderate mortal may find out some expressions, that shall seem to countenance his favourite dogmata, they think it highly necessary to lay down for themselves some indubitable positions, which may safely conduct them through the labyrinths of error and contrarieties. They know, for example, that the God of grace cannot possess a character essentially different from the God of nature, since he is the same God. They naturally expect much clearer displays of universal benignity under the former character, than those which the latter exhibits to their admiring view; and therefore they *suspect* those doctrines which create an opposition.

Upon inquiry, they discover that the proofs in their support are feeble and inconclusive. They discover that the passages on which this discord was founded, have been egregiously mistaken, and that fair criticism restores the harmony. When two very different or opposite interpretations solicit acquiescence, they give the preference to that which is the most rational in itself, and the most honourable to Deity; and they invariably find that this interpretation is the most consonant with the general tenour of Scripture. They explain obscure parts in the sacred writings, by those

which are the most conspicuous, instead of pursuing the contrary plan, and this teaches them to distinguish, most carefully, the plain and simple truths expressly taught by Christ himself and his Apostles, after they were commissioned by their Master to preach the Gospel, from those strong figurative expressions, and bold representations, occasionally employed by the same Apostles in their epistolary writings; where it is the invariable object not to preach another Gospel, or make an addition to that preached in their personal ministry, but to enforce the truths already promulgated, upon the hearts and consciences of the new converts to christianity. By pursuing a few natural and simple maxims of this kind, they solve difficulties innumerable; they discover a perfect harmony between the word of God, and that reason which God has given them to judge of it. They believe, because they discover truths perfectly congenial with the nature, wants, and expectations of men, and perfectly consistent with the character and perfections of Deity.

The man, who has thus purified his faith from the dross of false theology, well knows the difficulties which attend the process; and this inspires him with true charity towards those, whose ideas of christianity differ very considerably from his own. Fully convinced that faith in Jesus Christ, as it was preached to the first converts, is the foundation of our religion,—and not the doctrine of hereditary guilt and depravity—convinced that “other foundation no man

can lay, which shall be permanent, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," he is careful to separate the wood, hay, stubble, from the gold, silver, and precious stones, that have been built upon it; yet he rejoices in the assurance, that "if any man's work shall be burnt, and he suffer loss, yet he himself shall be saved." He acknowledges that christians of different denominations possess the essentials, and he embraces them as brethren; though some may have inadvertently added many superfluities, sometimes trifling, often pernicious. But he is careful not to permit this charitable disposition to degenerate into a spirit of indifference. He knows that truth is of the highest importance, and that it inevitably leads to very important consequences; while it is in the nature of error to be a dangerous guide; and though charity hopeth all things, and believeth all things, respecting the motives by which the advocates for false systems are actuated, yet it does not prevent him from perceiving that all false religion is an enemy to the true. It infuses a multitude of wrong notions, and directs the mind to wrong objects. Truth is one, error is infinite; and the combined influence of individual errors, like that combination of depravity which you have ascribed to an original taint, may become so extensively pernicious, as, in process of time, to check and destroy, like baneful weeds, the benignant influence of truth. This remark is strikingly confirmed by the observations already made concern-

ing the progress of infidelity, preceded and occasioned by the no less extensive progress of superstition.

We are rapidly approaching, Sir, to that period in which mankind will embrace a rational religion, or none ; since men will reason, it is of high moment that they reason right ; since they experience the use of reason in their secular concerns, they cannot conceive it to be useless in religion. In this age of reasoning, it is very necessary to be assured, that the religion which comes from God is perfectly conformable to the dictates of reason ; it is of the first importance to evince, that those religious opinions, which have created the greatest difficulties, and become the strongest impediments to embracing the Gospel, constitute no part of the Gospel ; that they are pernicious additions, which destroy the simplicity of our religion, and cast a deep shade over its native excellency. The philosophic enemies of christianity contemplate these adventitious blemishes with pleasure. They love to consider them as the most important parts of the christian religion. They also affect to censure that class of christians, who deny what are termed the peculiar doctrines, with as much severity as the most orthodox believer. They are hurt when they meet with a christian, who presumes to be rational, and impertinently insinuate that he cannot be a genuine christian. The reason is obvious. The primitive unadulterated religion of Jesus consisting of a few principles, as rational as they are

interesting, these opponents are disappointed when christianity is confined to them ; they are now deprived of objects against which they may display the force of argument, or direct the shafts of ridicule. They weep because there is nothing left to conquer.

Of the innumerable errors, which have tarnished and disgraced our holy religion, the one which you consider as lying at its foundation, appears, to the writer of these letters, to be one of the most pernicious in its tendency, and the weakest in point of evidence. The above animadversions will indicate how little can be urged in its support, even by your eloquence, on the principles of reason ; and there is scarcely a doctrine that has been embraced by the most enthusiastic visionary, which cannot boast equal, if not greater authority from Scripture. A few, very few detached passages, taken from their peaceful stations, where their plain and simple meaning was well understood by their connexions, have been assiduously collected together, and compelled, by forced interpretations, to give a fallacious evidence in favour of a doctrine they knew not, and with which they had no concern. These are strong expressions, but they are dictated by a conviction founded on the strongest proofs.

The abettors of the calvinistic doctrines act consistently, in being strenuous for the support of original depravity ; for they justly view it as the *foundation* of a system, which they have mistaken for genuine

widely in the article of respectability. The concealment, it is true, annihilates every claim to personal respect; but if you should think his arguments worth your notice, he is convinced that your manner will be worthy of yourself, and consistent with that high regard for your merits entertained by

A LAYMAN.

LETTER II.

Calvinistic Doctrine of Original Sin, or Total Depravity, stated. Not consistent with Scripture. No evidence in the Sacred Writings, that Adam was created with a perfect Nature, or that the sinful Propensities of his Posterity were derived from him.

SIR,

As the preceding letter was principally devoted to the examination of your arguments, and proving the insufficiency of the mode you have adopted to defend the doctrine of hereditary depravity, it has unavoidably assumed the appearance of a personal attack, which cannot be pleasing to yourself, nor is it to the author, who contends not for victory, nor wishes to irritate, but sincerely aims at your conviction. Confiding in the liberality of your disposition, and in the accuracy of your judgment in cases where you dare

to exercise it, he is not without hopes that the observations already suggested will not only have explained, in a satisfactory manner, the cause why you cannot possibly convince the skeptic of the futility of his reasoning, but dispose you to doubt the validity of *your own*. He flatters himself also, that if you will accompany him through a more minute review of the doctrine you so warmly espouse, than you may hitherto have taken, it will appear in every point of view totally unworthy of your patronage. This expectation is encouraged by several symptoms, which indicate your dissatisfaction at a tenet you think it is your duty to embrace and enforce. Your efforts to suppress the exercise of reason could only have been made, in consequence of your perceiving something unreasonable in the doctrine itself. You obviously consider such a suppression as a sacrifice due to a revealed truth; as a species of *auto de fe*, the severity of which you very sensibly feel. You frankly allow, that "unbelieving doubts are ever springing up in the heart." Could you but entertain the idea, that these unbelieving doubts proceed from the *understanding* rather than from the *heart*, instead of suppressing, you would think it right, to encourage them. Or, if you choose to ascribe them to the heart, conceive that they may be seated in the *best* of its affections, its *benevolence* and its *love of rectitude*, and you will be prepared to suspect, that there must be something essentially wrong in your hypothesis, which can be

inimical to feelings like these. Such circumstances strongly indicate, that you are open to conviction, and that you would gladly renounce the doctrine, did you not believe it to be of divine authority.

It is, good Sir, so painful for a sensible, conscientious man to hold a faith, which is at variance with his judgment, that it becomes an office of charity to endeavour to relieve him from his embarrassment, by collecting incontestible proofs, that such sentiments cannot be true, and that it is the duty of every reasonable being to dismiss them from his creed.

The strong objection which was the subject of animadversion in the former letter, is by no means the only one to be proposed to the doctrine which you have unfortunately espoused; and had you been more successful in your attempts to confute it, your victory would have been incomplete. There are many other objections, which you have passed over in silence, that deserve your most serious attention; and these shall be considered in the present and some following letters.

In order to do justice to the subject, it will be requisite to state the doctrine of original sin, not in the partial and delicate manner, which your regard for its character has induced you to pursue, but as it is boldly expressed in the creeds and confessions of those, who have enforced it with synodical authority.

That no suspicion may be entertained of exaggeration, or of a design to "set down aught in malice,"

the catechism composed by the assembly of divines shall be our guide. In that summary of christian faith the subject is thus treated.

“God created man in his own image; in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; with dominion over his creatures. When God created man, he entered into a covenant with him upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.

“Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

“Sin is any want of conformity to, or a transgression of the law of God.

“The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was the eating the forbidden fruit.

“The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in the first transgression.

“The fall did bring man into a state of sin and misery.

“The sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin, together with all the actual transgressions which proceed from it.

mitted against his infinite majesty, should be punished to the utmost ; that is, with the everlasting punishment of both body and soul."

These, Sir, are the sentiments imposed upon us, by a conspiracy of fallible men, as the oracles of the living God ! These are the glad tidings of salvation which a merciful Redeemer came to proclaim ! God so loved the world, that he sent his Son to preach these horrors, from which the multitude cannot possibly escape ! This is the last and best dispensation from him, who will not always chide, nor hold his anger forever ! If these doctrines be true, and if it be true that the Divine Being delighteth not in the death of a sinner, what insufferable violence must this vindictive justice commit upon the compassion of his nature !

But it is time to inquire what foundation there is for this horrid hypothesis ? A doctrine so tremendous, that it harrows up one's soul as we are stating it, ought to be established upon the firmest foundation. It ought to be proclaimed from heaven by a voice which all can hear, and no one misinterpret ; and all the powers of natural reason, and the best feelings of humanity, ought to be brought into submission by some incontestible authority.

You confess that it is difficult to reconcile this doctrine with the principles of reason ; but you think that it is taught in the Scriptures, and countenanced by the moral state of mankind. We will therefore

first consider the evidence from Scripture, and inquire whether that be so convincing as to deserve being placed in competition with the powerful objections, which natural reason suggests. By pursuing this plan, your reluctance to attend to the voice of reason may possibly be subdued.

The doctrine of original sin, as stated above, presupposes the perfection of Adam's nature before the fall ; teaches the depravity of human nature, in consequence of the fall ; and the eternal punishment of the majority of the human race, in consequence of this depravity.

Respecting the first article, if we had been taught to understand by the perfection of his nature, Adam's innocence, and the rectitude of his disposition, simply, the position would have been admissible. He must have been innocent before he was guilty, and his dispositions upright before they were perverted. But much more has been understood. It has been asserted, that the powers and propensities of our first parents were vastly superiour to the present standard of human nature ; once "beams-etherial," now "sullied and absorbed." These, however, are mere phantoms of the brain, unsupported by a single proof. The sacred historian informs us, that God made man in his own image. *Catechisms*, not *Scripture*, have added, in *knowledge*, *righteousness*, and *holiness*. Now the only instance upon record of knowledge, is, that of his having given names to the various animals, as they

were brought before him, which is too circumscribed to be worthy of an encomium; and as to his righteousness and holiness, the Scriptures are perfectly silent. It is true, Adam was created with a thirst for knowledge, which induced him to eat of the "tree to be desired to make one wise;" but he manifested his ignorance, in not discovering the artifices of the evil one, and in imagining that he could improve his situation by disobeying the divine command.

The expression "let us make man in our image," has been variously interpreted. It has been considered by some as referring to the spirituality of our natures, or to our possessing an immaterial principle, in distinction from every other class of animated beings. Whoever admits this sense, must also admit that it is equally applicable to the offspring of Adam, in their present dishonoured state. This, of consequence, is not the high dignity forfeited by the fall. Some imagine, that the expression relates to the exalted powers conferred upon man, in distinction from the lower creation, by which he is rendered capable of mental improvements and mental enjoyments. In this sense also, is the term applicable to the offspring of Adam, even in these days of their supposed degeneracy.

The Scriptures themselves obviously confine the expression to the universal dominion given to the human race over all the other creatures of God. "And God said, let us make man in our image, and after

our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every thing that creepeth upon the earth; so God created man in his own image," &c. In consequence of this wonderful superiority in his mental powers, is man become the sovereign of creation, and able to render every part subservient to his will. He is able to subdue the strength of the strongest, and bow their necks to his yoke; he arrests the flight of the swiftest, and exceeds, by his inventions, the craft of the most crafty. "He has more wisdom than the fowls of the air, and more understanding than the beasts of the field;" and thus may he be viewed as the vicergerent on the earth, the representative of the Universal Sovereign. This interpretation is also as applicable to the offspring of Adam, as to their first parent. In no sense, therefore, can the passage be confined to that state of high perfection ascribed to Adam during his innocence; and yet it is the strongest argument in favour of the position, that has ever been adduced.

Another passage of Scripture has indeed been pressed into the service, which is, the observation of the preacher in Ecclesiastes; "God made man upright; but they found out many inventions." It will be unnecessary to detain you in attempting to prove that the preacher is not, in this place, speaking of Adam's transgression; but simply making observations

upon common life; that by *man* we are to understand mankind in general; for we are told, *they* found out many inventions; nor is the phrase in any way applicable to that single transgression of our first parents; the invention manifested in this transaction was found out by Satan, by which Adam was unfortunately deceived.

Not being forbidden by any express declarations in Scripture, we may innocently presume that the powers and faculties of Adam and Eve were as limited as our own, and that their propensities to good and evil were perfectly similar. Whence comes it, otherwise, that they should fall an easy prey to so slight a temptation? The conflict they had to sustain, in order to manifest their obedience to the divine will, was far inferiour to many, over which multitudes of their posterity have triumphed. If we consider the Mosaic account of this event as a literal fact, and not allegorical, the temptation was scarcely beyond the powers of a schoolboy to resist; their ready seduction was totally inconsistent with that superiority, that exaltation of character arbitrarily ascribed to them. To manifest that a supposition of this kind must be destitute of evidence, we have only to recollect that no opportunity could possibly occur for their displaying this elevation of their natures, had they really possessed it. No scenes could possibly present themselves favourable to the exercise of numberless virtues, which have adorned so many of their offspring. In the in-

fantile state of the world, it was the easiest thing in nature to be perfectly innocent, for scarcely could a vice be committed. When the first pair were the only inhabitants of the globe, there could be no temptation to fraud, oppression, deceit, avarice ; nothing to excite anger, jealousies, envyings, lawless ambition, or to infuse implacable malice. Social and relative duties were the same, and circumscribed within the narrowest bounds. No drunkenness nor adultery, nor theft, nor covetousness, could possibly constitute a part of their vices. Benevolence to every creature newly subjugated to their will was so natural, that they must have been monsters not to possess the disposition. They could not have experienced a series of vexations and disappointments, to irritate their minds, and render them peevish or discontented ; nor have suffered an accumulation of unmerited evils, which might tempt them to doubt the existence of a Deity, or suspect the wisdom and beneficence of his government. Placed in a garden replenished with delights, by the hand of their Creator ; and in a world where every thing new, grand, and wonderful, burst upon the astonished sight, must not the lowest of their degraded offspring have felt an impulse of admiration, love, and gratitude ?

Where then are the evidences of a superiority, which would render our first parents a different class of beings from their offspring ? What proofs, that they were qualified, by the transcendancy of their in-

tellectual and moral powers, to associate with angels, and hold special communion with God? The position is as void of evidence as it is of probability; and though it may be viewed as the chief corner-stone of your superstructure, we perceive, upon close examination, that it is destitute of solidity. Sir, it is porous, and crumbles at the touch.

Nor does the sacred history present us with stronger proofs, that the children of Adam derived sinful propensities from his first transgression. The Scriptures represent Adam as the parent of a mortal race, and they ascribe this law of mortality to his disobedience. But let us remember, that as life is the free gift of God, the continuation of our existence to a perpetuity cannot be claimed by us as a natural right. We may add, that it would prove a perpetual curse before the minds of men were fully prepared for so vast a design; and however repugnant it may be to our feelings, there is neither injustice nor the imputation of an unnecessary severity in the temporary dissolution of our frames. Infinite wisdom can best decide concerning the mode of introducing this law of our dissolution, and infinite wisdom is able to convert the greatest seeming evil into the most substantial good. But we are not taught by any passage of sacred writ, that the vices of men, or their vicious propensities, are inheritances derived from the offence of Adam. This idea is merely an induction from expressions, which were intended to convey a very different meaning.

Had it been the object of the sacred writings to make us acquainted with so singular a fact, it surely would not have been passed over in total silence by Moses in the account given us of the first transgression. Shall we suppose him to have been inspired to write the history of the fall, and that he should have omitted the chief circumstance? Or that it should have been withheld from him, and revealed at a very remote period to others, who were not appointed to be the historians of the event? The supposition is extravagant. This is unquestionably the properest place for the narrative, but here we find it not. The first sin recorded after the grand offence was the murder of Abel by his brother Cain; and this horrid instance of fratricide is ascribed to the passions of anger and jealousy, which have multiplied murders since that event; there is not the most distant insinuation, that those passions were implanted by the disobedience of his father. When the wickedness of the world was so great that, according to the strong figurative language of the Scripture, "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart;" we are not informed that the sin of Adam was the cause of this wickedness, or that it grieved the Lord that he had permitted man to pollute his offspring. The event is represented as arising from the progressive degeneracy of men, "as they began to multiply upon the face of the earth," that is, to the contagion of evil example, and not to the develop-

ment of that grand germ of corruption implanted in the heart of man at the fall.

Again, as you allow that Jesus Christ came into the world to repair the ruin of the fall, it is natural to imagine that he would, in the course of his ministry, have made us clearly acquainted with the nature and extent of this ruin. We are assured, that the world was in a state of sin and misery ; but the derived corruption of human nature in consequence of the fall, is not intimated by the author of the christian dispensation, nor was it, previously to his appearance. We find no declaration, that he came to save a sinful world from hereditary sin. This doctrine is not mentioned in the commission given to the Apostles to preach repentance and remission of sins ; nor do we discover, in the execution of their commission, that they either lament the state of mankind, or upbraid the children of Adam, on account of the depravity derived from him.

Thus it is incontestible, that this article of your creed is not mentioned where it was most natural to expect it ; neither is it enforced by those who must have been the best informed, and who alone could possess authority to propagate it.

How, Sir, can you account for so very singular a circumstance ? How comes it that a doctrine, deemed so essential to christianity, should have been forsaken or omitted by those, whose peculiar province it was to place it in the most conspicuous point of view ?

How comes its foundation to rest solely on the interpretation given to a few phrases scattered in different parts of the Old and New Testament, which from their connexion, and from the manner in which they were uttered, are not only capable of a different construction but demand it? Expressions, some of which were obviously the strong language natural to occasional emotions, some proverbial, some descriptive of particular classes and characters of men, without any reference to the sin of Adam; and some were spoken by persons whom it would be ridiculous to suppose possessed of inspiration.

LETTER III.

Texts of Scripture examined. The Notion of a Total, Hereditary Depravity confuted by Observation and Experience. Stronger Proofs, that Men are upright and perfect, than that they are totally depraved.

SIR,

THE passages you quote, in support of your sentiments, illustrate and confirm the truth of the above observation; for not one of them has the most distant relation to the subject.* They all refer to a state of

* They are the following;

The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. What is man that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman,

actual depravity, without reference to its cause ; and they describe, in striking language, those vicious propensities too frequently observable both in individuals and in large communities, which may be the result of perverse education, evil habits, the force of bad example, and other causes which are known actually to exist, and whose influence is universally acknowledged, without insinuating that they are the streams, which necessarily flow from the original transgression of Adam. This propensity to sinful errors is fully expressed by “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his *youth* ;” and to this is it necessarily confined, if you will not compel it to start from its context in order to support an hypothesis. The phrase is mentioned twice in the book of Genesis. In the first instance it refers to that accumulated wickedness, that acquired corruption, which preceded the flood ; when “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In the

that he should be righteous ? How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water ? The Lord looked down from Heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside ; they are altogether become filthy ; there is none that doeth good, no not one. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin ? The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it ? Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me. We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?

second instance, it is expressive of the weak and imperfect state of our natures, which, instead of exciting the divine wrath, is a subject of his commiseration. "The Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done."* Your second and third quotations are rather unfortunate; for as it has been judiciously remarked,† they are no revelations from God, but exaggerated representations made of human infirmities by Eliphaz, the Temanite,‡ which provoked even the patient Job to reply, "miserable comforters are you all;—Shall vain words have an end, or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest?" &c. Again, "ye are all forgers of lies; ye are all physicians of no value; Oh, that you would altogether hold your peace, and it should be your wisdom."

Let this instance, Sir, of the absurdities and inconsistencies which result from an indiscriminate quotation from Scripture be added to those mentioned in a preceding Letter; and let them exert their influence to dissuade you from a practice, which is the fertile source of every error; which renders the Oracles of Truth as equivocal and contradictory as the Delphic Oracles or the Sibyl's Leaves.

* Genesis vi. 5. Ib. viii. 21.

† See a Review of Mr Wilberforce's Treatise, by T. Belsham, page 43.

‡ Job xv. 14, 16. Ib. xvi. 2, 3.

As all the other passages you have quoted relate merely to the state in which either individuals, or large bodies of men, may be occasionally reduced, they are equally irrelevant to our subject. They express truths which no one has ever disputed, but they give you no assistance in forming your hypothesis explanatory of these truths. They mention facts alone; and it is the hypothetic abettors of an extravagant system alone, that presume to trace the cause to the sin of our first parents.

You may perhaps still argue, that the declaration of David, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me;" and that of the Apostle, "we were by nature children of wrath, even as others," are too explicit to be included in the above remark. We will, therefore, pay them more particular attention.

The expression of David is generally allowed to be a part of the penitential Psalm he composed, upon his having been guilty of the sins of adultery and murder. It is manifestly the strong language of contrition and self-abhorrence. He adopted a phrase proverbial among the Jews, by which he intimated, that his vicious propensities were so great, that had he been born with them they could not have been stronger. Such terms are common in all countries, and cannot be mistaken by natives and contemporaries, whatever interpretations they may suffer from the comments of foreigners, or from the changes which

may in process of time take place in the modes of expression. Let us suppose, Sir, that you, in the warmth of your laudable zeal for the abolition of the slave trade, should declare in the Senate, that those who persevere to carry on that detestable commerce must be *devils incarnate*. We will suppose your speech to descend to posterity, and that the expression should meet with a commentator, who explained the terms in their literal sense, seriously adducing them as proofs, that they were not *men*, but *devils* in the form of men, who were used to engage in the traffic; we will suppose him to conclude, that it was customary for evil spirits to assume the human shape, that they might man the ships from Liverpool and other places, in order to deal in human flesh, torment the inoffensive negroes, and transport them into wretched captivity for the sake of gain; would you not smile, though you might be disposed to excuse the blunder on account of the pointed satire it contained? That the terms being *born in sin* were equally proverbial among the Jews, is evident from a similar expression being employed by the Pharisees, when they questioned the man who had been blind, concerning the manner in which he had received his sight. Upon his asserting, "if this man [Jesus] was not of God, he could do nothing;" they answered, "thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?"*

* John ix. 33.

Nothing could be more obvious than that the expression was familiarly used as a mark of ignominy and reproach. It was applied to those, who were really degenerate, or who were looked down upon with contempt as the refuse of the people. In the deep abasement of his soul, David appropriated it to himself, as in the haughtiness of his soul, the Pharisee applied it to another. That the expression could not have the most distant reference to the doctrine of original sin, is most evident from this second mode of application ; for the Pharisee, proud as he was, could not have the arrogance to deem himself or his sect to be exempt from a state of degradation, that necessarily involved all mankind.

Respecting the other passage, “and were by nature children of wrath, even as others,”* let us suffer the Scriptures to explain themselves, without the interference of crude ideas of our own. They tell us that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” We learn from history, sacred and profane, that the world was plunged into the depth of corruption and depravity, before the appearance of the Son of God. Of this depravation, St Paul gives us a dreadful summary in his Epistle to the Romans.† The same Apostle writing to the Ephesians, who were also Gentiles, expatiates upon the regenerating nature of the christian doctrine ; and draws the contrast between their

* Ephes. ii. 3.

† Ch. i. 21. *passim*.

present and their former state. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein, in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom we all had our conversation in time past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

The word *nature*, it is well known, has various significations; and the precise idea to be affixed to it can only be ascertained by the subject in question, or by circumstances relative to it. Sometimes it signifies custom, sometimes prevailing disposition, sometimes particular laws in the physical, intellectual, or moral world; sometimes characters that distinguish one class from another, or discriminate individuals in the same class. The context necessarily applies the word to that state and situation in which the Ephesians, together with the whole Gentile world, were placed before their conversion to christianity; and it points out the cause of their having been children of wrath, even as others; not on account of Adam's transgression; not on account of this original taint derived from thence, but on account of transgressions of their own. "Ye walked in times past according to the course of this world;"—"among whom also we had our conversation in times past," &c. Is it possible for signification to be more explicit and decisive?

You have remarked that assailants have generally the advantage over the defendant; but surely, Sir, you should have made some exceptions and limitations according to the mode of defence that may be adopted. If it be permitted to collect from all quarters, and pour forth a multitude of detached scriptural expressions, the defence is perfectly easy; it consists simply in quotations and assertions; whereas, the labour of proving, that the true signification of these passages is perverted, and that they are not applicable to the subject, falls to the lot of the assailant. A mound is thus thrown up with expedition; and though it has no solidity in itself, it serves to retard the progress of the assailant, who is condemned to remove it.

Having shown that no evidence, in support of the hereditary depravity of mankind, can be legitimately deduced from Scripture; and that those passages, which you have manifestly mistaken for a cloud of witnesses, are dissipated like mists, as you approach and penetrate them, we will now examine the merits of the arguments, you have urged from experience and observation. These you consider as being unanswerable; and confiding in the strength of your proofs, you pronounce every one to be obstinately dull, who does not admit them.

The cause of your mistake respecting the argument, and also the capacities of your opponents, has already been pointed out. It has been proved, that

you have hastily blended conclusions and inferences with facts, and imagined that whoever admits the latter, must yield to the former. We might readily concede, that there is universally and permanently as much wickedness in the world, as you have represented ; we might grant, that the principles of mankind are totally corrupted, and that their practice is in every way correspondent ; we might, in short, accept your statement, or even prefer that of St Paul, which is much stronger, and yet deny that an original depravity was imbibed in consequence of Adam's transgression. We might allow, that all mankind had corrupted their ways, and not suppose that they were born in sin ; and were it a literal fact, that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one," we might pertinently attribute it to that progressive depravity of which humanity is capable. But we are not under the obligation of making such large concessions. All the proofs you have produced do not demand it, nor will a strict attention to the general character and conduct of men, admit it. All that you have said ; all that the great Apostle has said ; all that the sacred historian has recorded, concerning that universal corruption, which occasioned the deluge, relate to particular periods, circumstances, and characters, and are no more to be considered as the genuine history of the human heart, in its habitual dispositions, than storms, tempests and pestilence, indicate the general state of

the atmosphere ; or conflagrations indicate the natural malignity of fire.

It is an acknowledged maxim, *corruptio optimi est pessima*. Whatever possesses very limited powers, cannot prove, in its worst estate, extensively detrimental ; whatever possesses extensive powers, however excellent, may in certain situations be rendered dreadful. Those powers and propensities characteristic of the human mind, which in their natural and placid operations are productive of much good, constitute the bonds of society, relieve distresses, and advance happiness a thousand ways, may, by being perverted, spread desolation and horror. But these perversions are extraordinary ; they are excesses, which distort and deform the human heart, and not faithful portraits of its real character, or native propensities.

In the midst of the greatest excesses and most flagrant immoralities, much good is still observable. In the worst of times there are many laudable exceptions to the general depravity of character, and in the worst of characters some remaining virtues. Vice being not only pernicious in its tendency, but often quick in its effects, alarms, strikes, and we instantly complain. Virtue being in its nature placid, and, like our aliments, productive of habitual health by imperceptible operations, in its usual tenour scarcely produces an encomium. It is some extraordinary and almost romantic virtue alone, that has power to arouse

our attention. These are facts, which cannot be denied ; but they could not exist, if the doctrine of original sin, as stated in catechisms, were true ; they could not exist, if man were naturally inclined to hate both God and his neighbour ; if he were incapable of doing any good, and if he cannot avoid sinning, more than a bad tree can be productive of good fruit ; or if the human heart were “tainted with sin, radically, and to the very core.” If this were the wretched state of man, the pollution would be universal throughout the species, and so complete in each individual, that our natures would exhibit a mass of corruption inconsistent with a state of society. We should be as the fierce beasts of the forests ; and the “pestilence,” instead of “walking in darkness,” would stalk forth at noonday.

No one, who has studied the heart of man free from the bias of systematic prejudices, has been able to discover such universal marks of innate depravity. Every attentive observer will contemplate a great variety of excellent qualities diffused over the human species. He will notice that where the mind has been properly informed, and where self-love is not predominant to a shameful excess, it knows not the dominion of evil propensities ; nor will he perceive the smallest traces of inherent, unprovoked, hereditary malice. He will perceive that in every case, where this calumniated mind has emerged from ignorance, and has acquired the power of discrimination,

it learns to know what is right, it acquires a delicate sense of what is right, loves and approves of it, severely censures and reprobates its contrary, unless some selfish pursuit, or ardent desire of immediate gratification, shall have hardened the heart, for the instant, or perverted the judgment. We have instances innumerable in the history of human life, where the benevolent principle operates with wonderful energy ; in which the human mind manifests itself to be liberal, generous, compassionate, forgiving ; in which it has been impelled by exquisite sympathy to brave dangers, and face death itself, in order to succour the distressed. But as this subject has been so well treated by another writer, I will urge it no farther.*

You have only two ways of solving this difficulty ; the first is, to ascribe every remaining good observable in the unregenerate heart, to the influence of divine grace. But this will render the grace of God much more diffused than is consistent with your general system. It will break down that barrier, which is so assiduously erected between the real christian and the unconverted ; and yet, if the mere moral man and nominal christian be supposed destitute of these divine influences, to what can we ascribe the good qualities so frequently observable in the professedly wicked, which, in some instances, have put the professed people of God themselves out of countenance ?

* See Belsham's Review of Mr Wilberforce's Treatise, Letter IV.

The second method is to deny the facts ; and, in the face of the strongest evidence, to assert, with the Walloon church, that all the works of the natural man are vicious in themselves, consequently that they must displease God, and be condemned by him ; that its best deeds are only *splendida peccata* ; and however beautiful they may appear to the undistinguishing eye, they are inevitably sinful, because the heart is corrupt. But this mode of evading the difficulty is a sacrifice to hypothesis, which no one who pretends to reason, will ever admit. Predetermined that the doctrine of universal corruption must be true, and shall be true, the supporters of such an opinion render themselves wilfully blind to the strongest evidences of the contrary. They resemble some disciples of the acataleptic, or incomprehensible school, among the ancients, who denied the reality of motion, because its existence would entirely confute their system. Common sense knows not of any splendid sins, excepting such actions as are performed with a design to impose upon mankind, or which spring from unworthy motives. Ambition, vanity, hypocrisy, may be guilty of them ; but where the heart of man is incited by the love of man to deeds of justice, liberality, compassion, and mercy, they must be sterling. Such deeds cannot be counterfeit, and he that gives them the name, knows not the nature of coin.

You strenuously maintain, Sir, the necessity of regenerating grace ; you acknowledge this grace to be

perfectly free in its operations, and yet you inform the poor impenitent sinner, that he must earnestly supplicate for its communications ; but according to the principles now advanced, this very prayer, proceeding from a corrupt heart, must be offensive to the Deity, a punishable sin ; the humblest supplication which the natural man can utter, instead of procuring the desired blessing, may render it still more remote. If your good sense should preserve you from such an absurd extreme, then you must be compelled to admit, that the natural man is able, without any immediate interposition of divine grace, occasionally to imitate the good works of the true children of God so closely, that it is impossible to distinguish the one from the other ; and the carnal man, unpurged from the corruptions of the fall, becomes a formidable rival to the spiritual man, with all his superiour advantages ; consequently this grace is not so absolutely necessary as you have conceived ; or it is more liberally diffused than your system can possibly grant.

The assertion, that we are naturally prone to hate both God and man, is also an extravagant assertion. Considered in an absolute, unqualified sense, it is a stigma which reflects dishonour upon the hypothesis which gave it birth, or upon the hearts of the theologians who first gave it a place in their creeds.

It is granted that our commerce with the world presents us with too many instances of jealousies, envyings, malice, revenge, &c. generated from rival-

ships, the disappointment of unreasonable desires, irritations at supposed injuries ; but with no instances whatever of inherent, hereditary, unprovoked malice ; and whenever these passions are carried to excess, whatever be their cause, common phraseology passes an encomium upon our species, by terming the disposition *inhuman*.

The hatred, which wicked men may be said to entertain against their maker, is also an acquired, not a natural vice. It can only proceed from the strength of corrupt affections, or from their entertaining erroneous ideas of the divine character. When inordinate desires arise, which the subject is determined to indulge at all events, the precepts of religion and morality are rendered irksome to him ; the idea of the divine presence and inspection becomes as insupportable, as the presence of a tutor or monitor to a disciple, whose mind is bent upon some illicit pursuit. Under the influence of this perverted disposition, he may possibly “say in his *heart*, There is no God ;” or becoming hardened in his iniquity, he may inquire, ‘ Who is the Lord, that I should serve him ?’ But his is an adventitious, perverted state of mind. It is so far from being natural to man, that many conflicts must be maintained before this conquest of prophaneness can become complete. The infant mind knows it not ; early youth knows it not ; it is alone the dreadful acquirement of the determined sinner.

Again, unworthy conceptions formed of the divine character, may also inspire an indifference, perhaps an hatred. When men consider their Creator altogether such an one as themselves, it is not surprising that they should lose their respect for him ; and those frivolities which are deemed essential to his service, naturally bring his service into disrepute. This has been already considered as a principal cause of the atheism so prevalent in a neighbouring nation. Some dogmata, also deemed essential to christianity, by representing the Deity as implacable, revengeful, severe beyond the bounds of reason and justice, are not calculated to inspire love or filial veneration. Love has for its object, qualities which appear amiable and attractive. Hatred, the reverse ; its objects are qualities apparently injurious and repugnant. According to the ideas cherished of the moral perfections of the Deity, will be the habitual state of mind concerning him. Is there a being, can such a being exist, who habitually contemplates the great God as the source of every possible excellence, as the benevolent Father of universal nature, and yet entertain the disposition of hatred against him ? If indeed any one should become a proselyte to the doctrine for which you are so strong an advocate, without presuming to entertain the hopes of being one of the elect ; if he believes that he shall finally be condemned for sins committed before his existence, and for actual transgressions which he could not possibly avoid ; while he beholds

others ~~not~~ more deserving, made participants of that grace which is denied to him ;—you may urge upon him the sovereignty of God, with all your eloquence ; it is an attribute he will never adore ; nor can you point out to him any one that is entitled to his love. He may hate ; such an offence may come ; but woe to the principles that gave it existence !

You have cited the humours and froward dispositions of children as proofs of your hypothesis. Take their sudden gushes of passion, or occasional instances of perverseness, as your argument, and we will oppose the innocence, simplicity, amiableness, confidential friendships habitual to them, in support of ours. But these concessions are much too liberal, for we may securely maintain, that the greater part of that frowardness of temper, you behold as a mark of original depravity, is to be ascribed to a perverse education from the earliest infancy. That sublime fabulist Milton, whose poetic fictions, concerning the fall, have frequently been mistaken for Scripture history, represents Satan infusing pernicious dreams into the ear of Eve, while sleeping in the bower ; he may possibly have borrowed the idea from the conduct of mothers and nurses, who so frequently infuse poison into the minds of their infants while they are yet in their cradles. One of the first perceptions of the infant, is its unbounded influence over its indiscreet guardians, whose fond indulgences soon generate, increase, and multiply perverse desires, until the feeblest

of all beings becomes the most tyrannical. Thus do their ignorance and imprudence pervert the young mind at the earliest period, and when the pernicious fruits appear, the mischief is unjustly thrown from themselves back to our primitive ancestors. When, Sir, you contemplate the malignant effects of a perverse education, at every period of early life, and behold the degree of good, powerfully operative in the human mind, under every possible disadvantage, will you not acknowledge, that Providence has infused a large share of virtuous disposition into the human heart, in order to counteract the mischiefs, which the professed guardians of the human heart are hourly committing?

Before we quit the infantile character, permit me to call to your recollection a passage in Scripture, the beauty of which is peculiarly striking. It is in *Mat. xix.* verses 13, 14. "Then were there brought unto him [unto Jesus] little children; that he should put his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them; but Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

What, Sir, could Jesus, the Son of an incensed God, the second person in the Trinity, and who, as God, must be, equally with the Father, offended at the first transgression, in which these children were involved; whose vindictive justice also required the eternal punishment of these little heirs of wrath, these

embryos of iniquity, these tainted germs of every thing that is vile and worthless ; could he invite them to approach his presence ? Could he pronounce, *Of such is the kingdom of heaven ?* Why, Sir, your creed tells you, that “ all mankind, by the fall of our first parents, lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to the pains of hell forever ! ”

Oh, Reason, how art thou humbled by system, when compelled to employ thy powers to reconcile contrarieties like these !

Much, much more could be urged upon this subject ; but if you dare to consult your reason, the above must prove sufficient. If not, we will only subjoin that those very Scriptures, the perversion of which constitutes the foundation of your faith in universal depravity, absolutely require you to renounce it. They speak as frequently and as copiously of righteousness, uprightness, perfection, purity of heart observable among mankind, as they are free of their corrections and reproofs at the instances of degeneracy. “ A wicked man,” says Solomon, “ hardeneth his face ; but as for the *upright*, he directs his way.”* “ Judge me, O Lord, according to my *righteousness*,” says the very David, who was conceived in sin, “ and according to mine *integrity* that is in me. My defence is of God, who saveth the

* Prov. xxi. 29.

upright in heart.”* Again, “Shout for joy, ye that are *upright* in heart; all the *upright* in heart shall glory.”† “Mark the *perfect* man, and behold the *upright*, for the end of that man is peace.”‡

In the midst of the general depravity which occasioned the deluge, it is said of Noah, that he was “a *just* man, and *perfect* in his generation.”§ Although the mistaken friends of Job indulged their unjust censures against him, yet the sacred historian assures us, that he was “*perfect* and *upright*, one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”|| And Solomon bore testimony of David, that he walked “in *righteousness* and *uprightness* of heart before God.”¶

Many other passages might be quoted of a similar nature, and were we to adopt your mode of reasoning, we should infer from such declarations, that mankind are naturally perfect and upright. You would then be compelled to qualify and explain, in order to protect your hypothesis. Permit us to use the same liberty with the passages you have advanced, in order to protect human nature and its Author from being most unjustly libelled, and the contest will be terminated. We shall meet as friends on the centre of the plain; we shall mutually acknowledge that both Scripture and experience unite to represent mankind as imperfect creatures, as a wonderful compound of good and evil; that in the midst of much depravity great

* † Ps. vii. 8, 10. † Ps. xxxii. 11. ‡ Ps. xxxvii. 37. § Gen. vi. 9.
|| Job, i. 1. ¶ I Kings, iii. 6.

excellencies are discernible ; while many infirmities adhere to the characters, which the Scriptures themselves pronounce to be perfect.

LETTER IV.

Doctrine of Original Depravity can be reconciled neither with the Physical, nor Metaphysical Structure of Man. At variance with other Doctrines of the Calvinistic Scheme.

SIR,

Having attempted to remove those obstacles, which mistaken ideas of Scripture evidence, and of the acknowledged facts observable in human life, have opposed to your judging more favourably of human nature, and which have induced you to adopt the most inadmissible system mortals ever have invented, in order to solve apparent difficulties, we may now, it is hoped, without offence, approach the system itself ; and we shall venture to examine, without reserve, whether it be consistent with reason or common sense.

The hypothesis, which you urge upon our belief as the proper foundation of religion, natural and revealed, is that man was originally possessed of every moral and intellectual quality, before he had eaten the

forbidden fruit ; that, in consequence of this act, the powers of his mind became darkened, his will perverted ; that he was rendered prone to every evil thought and wicked deed ; and also, that he communicated this corrupt and depraved disposition to all his offspring, without a single exception.

You must allow, that this total degeneracy of our natures can only be ascribed to one or other of the following causes ; it must have proceeded from an absolute decree of heaven, or arbitrary exertion of divine power, introducing some immediate and miraculous change in the very constitution of our first parents, in consequence of their conduct ; or from the agency of an evil spirit possessing inherent powers, or receiving permission from God, to contaminate the parent stock, and the germs of existence, with every evil principle ; or the change itself must have taken place by the operation of some physical cause ; that is, there must have been some natural relation between the offence of our first parents, and the degenerate effects ascribed to it. These are the only alternatives that present themselves.

1. The first of these positions does not appear to be maintained by any advocate for your system. The whole blame is universally laid upon man ; and the consequences of his disobedience are considered as a just punishment for the abuse of his free will. It is even attempted to vindicate the wisdom and justice of God, in thus ordaining that the eternal fate of

myriads should be made to depend upon the single act of an individual, by the allegation, that if our first parents had proved obedient to this test, their posterity would have enjoyed perfection and felicity equal to the depravity and misery in which they are now involved. Indeed, the contrary sentiment could not be adopted without an accusation being brought against their Maker, of voluntarily becoming the immediate author of sin and misery ; without supposing that the greatest miracle, ever wrought by Omnipotence, was called forth for the worst of purposes ; that the Deity, finding himself disappointed in his gracious designs to render man perfect and happy, should, from a spirit of revenge, inflict the greatest curse upon man, which his all-comprehensive mind could devise.

2. Nor do they attribute to Satan any other power, than that of *seduction*. They suppose that this evil spirit, jealous of the felicity in reserve for the newly created favourites of heaven, determined to counteract the beneficent designs of the Creator. But that he was restrained from the use of any other means than that of artifice ; that he perverted the judgment, vitiated the desires, and gained a complete conquest over the will of Adam and Eve, by his wiles ; knowing that the natural consequence of their disobedience would be the ruin of themselves and their posterity.

3. Nothing remains, therefore, to explain this phenomenon, but the influence of physical causes. They, who admit the doctrine of hereditary depravity, are

compelled to believe, that the sin of our first parents so changed and contaminated their natures, that they were rendered incapable of procreating such a race of perfect and happy beings, as would have issued from their loins, had they continued obedient to the divine commands ; that their natural powers were so instantaneously changed, as to communicate to their innumerable progeny the guilt of their own sin, and a propensity to commit every other.

Let us now examine whether this be possible.

Human depravity is ascribed by the hypothesis to the sin of Adam and Eve in eating the forbidden fruit. Whether we consider the account of the first transgression given us by Moses, as allegorical, or as a literal fact, criminality of conduct must equally consist in disobedience to the divine command. The disobedience was manifested by the commission of an act in opposition to the divine prohibition, which included in it a previous disposition, prompting to the commission, and a voluntary compliance with this disposition. Criminality cannot be attached to the act itself, simply considered ; for, exclusive of the prohibition, it would have been no greater crime to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, than of any other tree in the garden. Nor could guilt be imputed to the first impulse of desire ; for although the height of perfection may consist in the elevation of mind above temptation, yet to check an irregular propensity, or rather a natural propensity, rendered

criminal alone by superiour authority, to check this from reverence to that authority, is justly deemed a virtue. Criminality must have commenced, therefore, with the yielding of the mind to the temptation, that is, with the resolution taken to disobey. It is consequently evident that Adam, in his best estate, did not possess the high perfection which would have placed him above an illicit propensity ; and it is no less evident, that he had virtually fallen from a state of purity and innocence of heart, before he partook of the forbidden fruit. His mind was rendered depraved by the determination of his will, before he actually committed a deed, which is said to have plunged all mankind in depravity. The act itself was simply an indication, that he had not virtue enough to resist the temptation. He must have been equally guilty in the eyes of his Judge, had some miraculous interference prevented the commission of it.

Here, by the way, we are again able to recognise parents similar to their offspring. For it is the encouraging and yielding to irregular desires, which constitute the criminality of *our* conduct. This is an additional evidence, that they were created in all respects like ourselves ; not excepting their being subject to temptations, and being subdued by them.

It appears, therefore, from the above considerations, that the dispositions of our first parents were perverted, before the actual commission of the deed, to which the whole evil of the fall is invariably ascrib-

ed. Are we then to imagine, that the depraved disposition generated in their minds by the temptation, is the primitive cause of all this hereditary mischief? Could the indulgence of this one propensity produce, by any physical laws of the constitution, such a singular change in their natures, that they should be necessitated by this change, to procreate a race of beings directly opposite in character, to the original nature infused by the immediate power of the Almighty? It is allowed that a prevailing cast of character may be transmitted to the immediate offspring; but the hypothesis attributes infinitely greater force to one particular desire, excited and gratified in a single instance, in *opposition* to the general character, than to the influence of the general character itself. Could this singularity, which has such a miraculous appearance, proceed from any physical law? Are we to conceive, that every other propensity, with which our great ancestors were endowed, was at once annihilated, or at once rendered inert by the momentary indulgence of a single desire? Are we to suppose that a particular *virus* was contained in this illicit desire, potent enough to spread itself over the human race for the space of so many thousand years, producing in the minds of men, not a single and similar propensity to disobey an individual command, but a congeries of perverse dispositions infinitely various, and numbers of them directly opposite to each other in their natures and qualities, and that no *virtuous*

propensity should be transmitted to check the contagion ?

Again, it is admitted by our opponents that Adam and Eve were blessed with sincere repentance, that they were informed of a promised Messiah, that they possessed a saving faith in him, and thus obtained the pardon of their sin. Why was not this penitent temper propagated in a similar manner, and diffused over the human race, that the dangerous and deep wound inflicted upon our natures might also have been healed ? Do not potent remedies discovered by mortals, by healing the diseases contracted by the vicious irregularities of parents, prevent their baneful effects from being transmitted to their offspring ? Shall we suppose a provisional power implanted in our natures of receiving transmitted benefits in one case, which is incidental, partial, and of inferiour importance, and not in the other, which is infinite in extent and duration ? The *bane* is asserted to contaminate the whole species, and to expose them to eternal misery, without their deriving the least advantage from the antidote of imputed repentance, while the great federal offender himself is supposed to escape with the slight punishment of transient sufferings and temporal death ! Can a position more extravagant and absurd be devised by the utmost efforts of human ingenuity ?

There can be no answer to these queries, without recurring to a proposition that has been disavowed ; without ascribing the cause to a miraculous inter-

ference ; or to some original law in their make, designedly planted there for the most pernicious purposes ; by means of which this perfect pair, and in them the whole human race, have been rendered prone to every evil, by one single incident, while the physical influence of other desires and propensities is not permitted to counteract the mischief. This is resolving the consequences of the fall into the arbitrary appointment of Heaven, and directly charging God with being the intentional author of universal depravity.

For the above reasons it cannot be admitted, that this particular desire, generated in the mind of Adam before the commission of the deed itself, should be propagated to his posterity, and branch out into an innumerable multitude of illicit desires, according to the operation of any physical law in his constitution.

Would we ascribe the baneful influence of the crime to the act itself, we should still be at a loss to discover the most distant connexion between the supposed cause and the dire effects.

It has already been observed that the act would have been indifferent, had it not been a trespass upon the divine prohibition. As such it was the consummation of guilt. It totally obliterated every title to the character of innocence. The unfortunate pair could no longer rejoice in the simplicity and purity of their minds, or enjoy that self-complacency and confidence in the divine favour, which a triumph over the temptation would have inspired. The dreadful

penalty was now incurred. The deed once perpetrated inevitably exposed them to the threatened punishment. To the illicit desire excited before the actual commission, succeeded terroure, shame, remorse, self-reproach, and repentance; which, however it might mitigate the divine wrath, could not restore their innocence, or replace them in the state of conscious integrity from which they had fallen. Such are the bitter fruits they had gathered from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

In a state perfectly similar may all the children of Adam be placed, under a consciousness of guilt, and in the fearful expectation of the righteous judgments of God. To this they are rendered liable by the very constitution of their natures, as being, like their first parents, moral, conscious, responsible beings; and not from any other inheritance than that of being of the same species as their great ancestors. Thus, by contemplating all the moral evils arising immediately from the commission of the act, it appears that they must have been personal; such as were the necessary result of their conduct, and relation to their Creator; and such as can only be experienced by the offspring that imitates their example. Nor could the act itself indicate any thing that had a natural or physical tendency to implant those seeds of universal depravity ascribed to the grand transgression. Shall we attribute the evil to the nature of the fruit,

Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe ?

Will this solve the difficulty ? Could the tree of knowledge of good and evil secrete from its juices, and deposit in the fruit, nothing but a malignant virus, without any mixture of the *good* ? Could its intoxicating qualities diffuse the most opposite frenzies over an innumerable progeny, and transmit them down to the latest posterity ? Is it owing to the subtile properties of this fruit, that even to the present hour the most opposite vices shall be generated ; that one child of Adam shall be disposed to the sin of avarice, another to that of extravagance and dissipation ; that this person is timid to pusillanimity, and his neighbour rash and impetuous ; that one character is treacherous, another overbearing and tyrannical ? Did this also infuse propensities to ebriety, lewdness, fraud, and deceit ; to envy, groundless suspicions, deliberate malevolence, cruelty, or vindictive anger ? In short, did it, in reality, operate in the manner fabulously recorded of Pandora's box, and shed over human nature a medley of evils various and opposite, containing within itself at the same instant the germs of all those wicked and contrary propensities, which have disgraced and tormented our natures ?

But whichever of the modes specified you may adopt, as the physical cause of human depravity, are we to extend the moral effects of the fall beyond the human race ? Did it exert its morbid influence over

all animated beings? We perceive something in the brute creation strongly resembling those propensities, which constitute, in certain circumstances, the vices and imperfections of men. Did the ruins of the fall extend to these also? Did it curse the hare, and many other animals, with a timidity which keeps them perpetually upon the watch; give ferocity to the tiger; subtlety to the fox; render the wolf treacherous and cruel; teach the insidious spider to weave its web for the incautious fly; impart to the scorpion its deadly sting? Did it impart to one animal its unconquerable sloth; or infuse into another its hereditary disposition to gluttony? Did it foment strifes and quarrels among animals of the same species; teach mastiffs to worry each other; inspire the gamecock with persevering hatred against its antagonist, and arm it with spurs for the contest; impart to various animals a degree of mutual enmity, as often as they become rivals or impediments to each other in the gratification of their appetites? Did it create birds of prey also, and diffuse universal hostility over the finny tribe?

If your answer be in the affirmative; then must you acknowledge, that a petulant power has been exerted by the Almighty to blast innocent natures, in revenge for crimes in which they had no share, for here hereditary propensity could not take place. If your answer be in the negative; whence came these apparent evils in the brute creation? If they were

originally implanted by the finger of God, is not such a constitution of things as contrary to our primary notions of the divine character, as the permission of moral evil in the moral world? Since characters and dispositions, so contrary to our ideas of rectitude and innocence, are permitted in the lower ranks of life by an absolute law of their natures, why may not that peculiarly susceptible and versatile creature, man, whose connexions with the world and its objects are infinitely more ample and diversified, become incidentally subject to them all, without the imputation of that hereditary depravity, which you suspect to be a deviation from the primary plan? Why may we not allow his various propensities to be with him, as with the lower creation, the satellites of self-love, the moral depravity of which consists in the perversion of desires innocent in themselves, in the criminal choice of objects, or undue degrees of indulgence, that is, in their opposition to the dictates of reason, or of an express command, or to those laws of benevolence, which are so peculiarly obligatory upon him, as a rational and social being?

If we consider the subject metaphysically, we shall be presented with objections not less formidable.

You have manifested, it is true, a degree of contempt for metaphysics, not uncommon to those who are totally unacquainted with the science; forgetting that some subjects cannot be satisfactorily treated in any other manner. But let it be remarked, that in

cases where the metaphysician is lost in his abstractions, and returns from his arduous pursuits dissatisfied with the result, yet he has in general acquired an accuracy and precision in his ideas, with which they are little acquainted, who have never applied themselves to the study. However, under this head, we will be as concise as possible.

We may first observe, that the doctrine is not very consistent with the ideas you entertain of *mind*.

It is singular that the doctrine of hereditary depravity should alone be entertained by those, who are strenuous advocates for the spirituality of mind. Should the Materialist adopt the system, he might claim some right to borrow an argument from the analogy subsisting between one material substance and another. He might be permitted to affix a more literal signification to the usual terms *corruption* of human nature, the *contagion* of sin, &c. and derive illustrations from the fermentative quality and expansive powers of leaven, which will in small quantities diffuse its influence over a large mass ; or from the dairy, when he observes how small a portion of an acrid juice is able, instantaneously, to change a large quantity of the blandest milk into a hard, coagulated substance. His only task will be to prove, that the cases are perfectly parallel ; and that dispositions and actions are inevitably contagious to mind, independent of the will. But an advocate for the spirituality of the soul, attentive to the high attributes with which

he clothes this spiritual nature, should be particularly cautious before he asserts that a momentary desire, of a peculiar nature, excited by a particular temptation, can be infectious to kindred minds, while they were in an unconscious state; and that this disposition, being infinitely divisible as matter, has been diffused over infinitudes of minds for successive generations.*

Further, the abettors of this system ought to form precise ideas of the nature of sin, and of mental depravity, before they impute either to the unconscious principle. The only malady of mind consists in impaired or disordered intellects, depraved desires, and perverse will. The former is by universal consent pronounced to be a misfortune, not a crime, because the mind is purely and involuntarily passive; and is not this precisely the case with the primitive temper and disposition with which we are generated? Allowing the definition of sin to be "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God," we ought to be perfectly clear in the position, that this transgression, or want of conformity, can be committed by the mind, before it enjoys any knowledge of moral obligation. If we should deem it absurd to impute errors in judgment to mankind, before they are capable of reasoning, how can we suppose their wills to be depraved before they had a will, or charge them

[* Two or three paragraphs are here omitted, as containing an argument not very obvious, and adding little strength to the author's general train of reasoning.—ED.]

with being guilty of Adam's sin, either in deed or by acquiescence, before they had power to act, or to testify consent ?

Will you say they sinned by *imputation* ? This is impossible, for sin is a *personal* act ; and were it possible, the imputation itself would be a greater injustice in the *imputer*, a greater violation of rectitude, than could be committed by the much injured innocent, even after he had acquired the power of *actual* transgression. But your hypothesis states, that the *heart itself is depraved, rotten to the core !* Can this statement be qualified by the idea of *imputation* ?

The utmost, that can possibly be ascribed to the human mind, is, that it is so formed as in certain circumstances it will indicate itself prone to the commission of evil. But such a conformation in itself has no more culpability, than the calamity of impaired intellects. Let the natural propensity be ever so strong, the subject must be as innocent of guilt, as the embryo of a tiger is void of cruelty, before it has acquired the instinctive ferocity of the dam. Virus itself is innoxious in an inert state. Nor could the inert virus of sin, supposing it to exist, be charged with demerit. This title must be suspended until it shall burst forth into actual transgression.

But the same mind is so formed, that in certain circumstances it shows itself prone to *good* also ; and why may not this fact be admitted with equal propriety, as an evidence of the universal excellence of

our natures ? Why may we not expatiate upon all the good observable in man, and pronounce him perfect, in consequence of his approved moral qualities, as legitimately as you stigmatize him with the character of universal depravity, from his bad ones ? Let this statement convince you, Sir, that the singular conformation of our natures cannot be, of itself, an indication of either virtue or vice, that it is equally void of merit or demerit, claims no reward, and deserves no punishment.

Does not the above examination fully prove that the doctrine of hereditary mental depravity, considered either physically or metaphysically, is an absolute impossibility ?

We shall now briefly show, that it is equally inconsistent with some other theological tenets, which are also deemed sacred by its supporters. For instance ;

If hereditary corruption be admitted, it will totally destroy all the subsequent temptations of Satan. If man be so depraved that he can neither think a good thought, nor perform a good action ; if his very best deeds are only splendid sins, there is no place left for the seductions of the evil one. His whole business must have been completed by the success of his first enterprise. He and his agents would be idling away their time, in employing arts of seduction upon those, who are already prone to every kind of iniquity ; or endeavouring to captivate those, who are already in their chains.

The doctrine of original depravity opposes with no less force, that of the true and proper incarnation of the Son of God. If it be true, that our natures are universally corrupt, when the Godhead became man in the person of Jesus Christ, he must have taken our corrupt natures upon him ; that is, he must also inevitably have partaken of this original hereditary depravity. If he remained untainted with original sin, it could not be our nature, which he took upon himself. Admitting that the union of the Divinity with humanity may have preserved the latter from actual transgression, may have checked and subdued every evil propensity, or may have prevented any from rising, yet the propensity must have been radically inherent in the person of Jesus Christ, as much as in ourselves. The divine nature must inevitably have taken the human, as it actually exists. Christ Jesus, therefore, as Man, however perfect in character and in conduct, yet being a child of Adam, he was, equally with those he came to save, "liable to the wrath of God, and the pains of hell for ever !" The pen trembles as it traces these consequences ; but they inevitably flow from your extravagant hypothesis ! The idea might be enlarged upon, were not the subject too revolting.

The position, that our Saviour was born out of the course of ordinary generation, does not solve the difficulty, unless it can be proved that Adam's depravity ran in the male line alone, notwithstanding that Eve

was first in the transgression. Mary, the mother of Jesus, being born of parents naturally depraved, must have partaken of their depravity, and this must have been communicated to all her descendants, whether according to the course of ordinary generation or not. It is maintained by our opponents universally, that our Saviour was of the seed of David, alone in consequence of his having been born of Mary; but as you apply the declaration of David, that "he was born in sin, and in iniquity did his mother conceive him," to the pollution derived from Adam, Mary must also have partaken of, and communicated its dreadful effects to her son.

Thus it appears, without a possibility of evading the force of the argument, that if the doctrine of hereditary depravity be true, and if the Son of God be also the Son of Man, being descended from Adam, in the female line, he "sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression."

LETTER V.

The Notion, that Men are punished for Sin inherited from Adam, is extravagant, irrational, and unscriptural. Shown to be absurd, and the Arguments in its Favour examined and confuted. It is in Opposition to the Attributes of God.

SIR,

THE other branch of your doctrine relates to the *punishments*, to which the hereditary sinner is exposed. These, as represented in creeds and confessions, consist in miseries, which it is not in the power of imagination to exceed. They state that “the offspring of Adam have, by his fall, lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.” The only mitigation of this dreadful sentence is, “God having out of his mere good pleasure from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and bring them into an estate of salvation through a Redeemer.”

The objections against the tenet of hereditary sin were simply, that it is unscriptural, irrational, and, physically and metaphysically considered, impossible; as well as inconsistent with other doctrines held to be of equal importance. The charges against this part

of the system are of a more serious nature. It contains sentiments which impeach the divine character, and are totally the reverse of the ideas it is our duty to cherish of the Great Universal Parent.

This sentence of condemnation consists of three parts, being made "liable to all the miseries of this life ;—to death itself ;—and to the pains of hell for ever."

To ascribe all the miseries of this life to the fall of Adam is merely hypothetical. It far exceeds the Scripture account, nor is it warranted by facts. Many evils manifestly arise from the original constitution of animated natures. Many evils are suffered by the brute creation, whose natures could not have partaken of any hereditary change from the fall of Adam. The sensitive powers which are the sources of pleasure, may, in some circumstances, become the occasions of pain ; and that susceptibility of impressions from surrounding causes, which is productive of health and vigour, may occasionally render our natures subject to diseases, as it finally induces the torpor of death. Many evils are superadded to the human species from the very superiority of our make ; from the extreme delicacy of our feelings ; from the nature and extent of our connexions with every thing around us ; from the infinite variety of our pursuits, and the number of our enjoyments. Animals suffer little more than bodily pain, for the instant. The majority of them have, in appearance, very imperfect

recollection of the past, and no dread of the future. Their pursuits commence and cease with animal gratifications. The objects which attract *our* attention are not to be calculated, and every object may prove a source of disappointment. Our sorrows arise from the recollection of past comforts ; they are the funeral eulogy of departed joys. Framed and situated as we are, various discomfitures must present themselves, from the very constitution of things, without their being evils entailed upon us by the crime of our progenitors. It will appear obvious to every one, who attentively studies, free from the bias of system, the nature of man, his powers, his connexions, his passions and affections, that we are as originally intended ; and that the shock of a single transgression could no more introduce such various and wonderful combinations, than the shock of an earthquake could newly organize the whole creation.

It is the immutable law of animal natures, that all which are born into this world, shall suffer the dissolution of their frames. From this law the human species, superiour as it may be in its faculties, is not exempt. Yet the human species are expectants of a higher state, where their natures shall be rendered capable of enjoying permanent existence, and more exalted happiness, than its present frailties will permit. Were they destitute of this expectation, as they cannot claim an exclusive right to immortality, there could be no injustice in their being involved in the

common ruin; *with it*, they are rendered the peculiar monuments of divine benignity, notwithstanding this temporary dishonour. Mortality being our destined lot, where is the injury in rendering our grand progenitor the parent of this mortal race; or the impropriety of constituting his disobedience to the divine command the medium of its introduction; since it inculcates this important lesson, that disobedience disqualifies for the enjoyment of permanent happiness, and therefore would render permanent existence a curse? Sin entered into the world through the first man, as he was the first sinner; but as there is not the most distant reason to expect, that his offspring would have been created with more perfect dispositions, and stronger powers than he enjoyed, each, like him, would doubtless have yielded to his own temptation; and the divine law being in force, that the wages of sin shall be death, these wages would have been universally the awards of our own personal transgressions. This statement must not only appear consonant with every attribute of Deity, but to every one, who believes in primitive and rational christianity, indicative of the divine benignity. He will, in that system, discover, that indemnification is promised to the virtuous part of our race, through the instrumentality of one, who is termed the second Adam, and whose perfection of character entitles him to the high honour of being the Saviour of mankind; for we are there taught, that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

According to this constitution of things, should it not perfectly quadrate with prior ideas or expectations, no injustice in the conduct of Deity towards his creatures can be discovered, or suspected. Ample provision is made for the reparation of temporary injuries ; and though we may not completely trace the whole plan of Providence, we can trace marks of wisdom and beneficence through the mists of obscurity which still remain. But to believe that the human race is rendered liable to the permanent inextinguishable wrath of God, and to the pains of hell forever, on account of the transgression of their forefather, or in consequence of any taint, that they have been necessitated to receive from him, is an extravagance that has never been equalled !

It has been asserted, and, I think, indisputably proved, that the doctrine of *hereditary depravity* has no countenance from Scripture, and that every text urged in support of that idea demands a different signification. We must now remark, that the *eternal punishment* of hereditary sin is likewise a phantom of the brain, a mere dream, and no revelation.

It must be remarked, that the doctrine of our being liable to eternal misery on account of original sin, has not so much as dubious phraseology, or the sound of a single text to support it. Most of the errors of systematic divines, whether of the Romish or Calvinistic church, proceed from their not possessing any clue to direct them through the diversities and appa-

rent contrarieties of scripture language. The particular style of each author, the nature of the subject, the state and circumstances of the persons addressed, &c. have been the occasion of varied phraseology, and this has been made to countenance every religious hypothesis, which the caprice of man has imagined, from the extravagances of Transubstantiation on the one hand, to those of Antinomianism on the other. In fact, almost every absurdity, which has disgraced theology, has arisen from literal interpretations being given to passages in holy writ, where the first principles of reason, and the essential doctrines of christianity demand a figurative, metaphorical sense. But on the present question, the opposite conduct has been pursued. The doctrine appears so enchanting, that language has been strained and distorted, in order to give it countenance. The only sentence denounced against disobedience, recorded in scripture history, is, "in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;" the only apprehension expressed by Eve, when tempted by the serpent, was, "if she ate of the tree, or touched it, she should surely die." After the deed was committed, the Lord God, allotting the punishment to each offender, passed the following verdict alone; he said unto the woman, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow, and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." And unto Adam he said, "Because thou hast

hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, *till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return.*"

What a predilection for the diffusion of misery must that mind have possessed; what barbarous ideas, worse than gothic, which dared first to interpret threats like these into our being made liable to the pains of hell forever, on account of the first transgression! What reason can be given for this unusual deviation from the literal sense of terms? By what rule of interpretation can it be proved, that the death denounced in this sentence should signify eternal existence, and an eternal existence in misery? The error and absurdity of this interpretation are happily demonstrated by an authority you will not dispute. St Paul, referring to this transgression of our first parents, says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The contrast, according to just rules of interpretation, must either relate to the privation of life by one event, and the restoration of life by the other; or it must run thus, "for as in Adam all were made eternally miserable, so in Christ shall all be made eternally happy." A

contrast which contradicts itself; for those, who are preordained to be eternally wretched, can never be eternally happy.

Neither is there a single passage in any other part of sacred writ, in which eternal misery is said to be the punishment allotted to the offspring of Adam, on account of Adam's transgression, or that can encourage the most eccentric imagination to draw the inference.

We shall, therefore, with a freedom similar to that indulged respecting the former article, examine whether the doctrine of the eternal misery of Adam's offspring, on account of his transgression, be consistent with those attributes, which we all profess to ascribe to the Deity, whom we unite to pronounce infinitely powerful, wise, just, and good.

But this freedom shall not prevent our proceeding with due caution, in the examination of a question upon which our characters may be said, in some measure, to depend; concerning which, if the doctrine be true, the boldness of the attack must appear rash and reprehensible; if false, every one will deem the doctrine itself to be impious. Let it therefore be previously noticed, that every argument demands a perfect agreement of the disputants concerning the signification of the terms used, and a mutual conviction of their aptitude to the subject. You will doubtless acquiesce in the definition, that Power is an energy capable of producing certain effects; and the

power of an intelligent being is the ability of operating some *designed* effect. By Wisdom is understood the perception and application of means adapted to certain ends. It implies a knowledge of the relation in which things stand to each other, and the direction of this knowledge to some suitable purpose. By Justice is meant the disposition to render to others what is their due. It consists in not inflicting punishment beyond their deserts; and in not depriving them of the good to which they have an undoubted claim. By Goodness, the disposition which consults and promotes the welfare of others to the utmost extent of power.

It is also to be presumed, that these terms have exactly the same import when applied to the character of Deity, as in their application to the characters of men; that the difference is in degree only, not in nature. Without this concession there can be no argumentation concerning the attributes of Deity. We shall neither understand each other nor ourselves; but shall rush into a chaos of incertitude, where nothing can be maintained or denied, proved or confuted.

These observations will, it is hoped, strike you, Sir, with all the force of self evident propositions; but they have not been uniformly admitted by advocates for the religious sentiments you have espoused. Some have imagined, that there is one code of moral conduct for God, and another for man; that what-

ever the Divine Being ordains or effects, must be right and good, merely because he is the agent ; that his sovereignty renders him superiour to every other rule, but that of his own good pleasure. Sentiments these, which subjugate every principle to the right of the strongest, and would render Satan himself wise, just, and good, could he but usurp the throne of the Almighty.

Let us now apply these principles to the history of original sin, and inquire how they will accord. The doctrine stands thus.

It was the primary design of the Almighty, all wise, infinitely just, and good God, to create a race of beings in order to confer upon them perfection of character, and render them eternally happy. Unfortunately Satan, an evil spirit of extraordinary powers, and astonishing subtilty—but yet a creature of God, and as such not above the control of his Maker—Satan, by a single stratagem, subverted the whole plan. It was not by procuring the annihilation of this new world, with its inhabitants, that he destroyed those complacential prospects of communing bliss enjoyed by the divine mind, but he involved an infinite majority of its rational inhabitants in endless misery. The infernal scheme was accomplished by seducing our first parents to transgress the divine command, while their whole progeny was in their loins ; and the seduction introduced at once such a total depravity into human nature, as to render the whole progeny of

Adam deserving of eternal damnation, even before they committed any actual transgression. This sin of Adam incensed the Deity against the whole human race, and now he determines to make the beings, who were originally designed to be partakers of his munificence, the dreadful monuments of his wrath. The intended objects of his lovingkindness are now the objects of his vindictive justice for crimes, of which they were totally ignorant. The infinite mercy of Deity, however, induced him to make a few exceptions, and to elect some from this immense mass of misery to everlasting life, out of his mere good pleasure, without any superiour degree of innocence on their parts, or the possession of a single good quality to recommend them to this peculiar mark of divine favour.

Surely, to every person free from prejudice, will the above statement, which defies the charge of exaggeration, appear as a confutation of the doctrine. But such is the force of early education, or of predilection for a particular system, and so great is the awe with which some minds are struck, when disposed, or, as they term it, *tempted* to doubt of tenets, they have been taught to regard as sacred, that the greatest absurdities lie concealed from the eye when they put on a religious garb ; and the same understandings, which despise common extravagances, will bend the knee to those contained in their theological creeds.

Is it not self evident, that if God foresaw from all eternity the seduction of Adam, and if he ordained from all eternity to save the elect out of the general wreck, either, that it was not the primary intention of the Supreme Being to render Adam and his posterity happy, or that he failed in the attempt? We cannot make the former supposition, without denying to the Deity the only motive that was worthy of him. Nay, we must suppose that he decreed to form, that is, to compel into existence, beings innumerable, whose eternal misery he distinctly foresaw. Can the imagination devise a determination of cruelty equal to this? Is it possible for such a doctrine to be true, and the Deity to possess the character ascribed to him by the Apostle John, when he says, "God is love;" a being essentially benignant? Could a good being form creatures for such an unworthy purpose, when the very definition of benignity is a disposition to diffuse all possible happiness?

The partial exertion of sovereignty in the predestination of a few to eternal life, which is eagerly urged as a proof of the infinite mercy of God, is in fact an evidence to the contrary. The salvation of this selected few must now be considered as a full indication of the Divine *Power* to save those destined to perdition, had he chosen it; and therefore it necessarily limits the divine benignity. Had the whole human race been involved in one equal ruin, we might have lamented that Satan should thus triumph over

the benevolent designs of our Maker ; and we might, even in misery, have venerated the disposition, which prompted to make us happy. But to display in this small specimen his power, while the disposition continues averse from the promotion of the grand primitive design, is an astonishing limitation of goodness ; and what increases the astonishment is, its being produced by the machinations of an infernal spirit.

Most advocates for the distinguishing tenets of calvinism seem to be much more deeply impressed with the idea of Power, than with any other of the divine attributes ; and to be much more cautious not to commit an offence, by placing limits to the exertions of this power, than to the manifestations of wisdom and goodness. The abettors of such sentiments should be peculiarly careful not to support a doctrine, which virtually destroys the sovereignty of God, and transfers that attribute to his grand antagonist. This corruption of the whole human race, and peopling the dominions of sin and misery with such multitudes of subjects, loudly proclaims the triumph, and extends the sovereignty of Satan over the wide region of the damned, while that of the great Creator is contracted to the small province of the elect. He is now deprived of every power, beyond this jurisdiction, but that of executing the purposes of Satan, by inflicting eternal punishments, in perfect conformity to Satan's malignant desires !

Can we venerate the infinite Wisdom of God, and believe that his plans were disconcerted by the wiles of an apostate spirit? Can we imagine that he should have miscalculated the powers of his new favourite man, on the one hand, and the artifices of the Devil on the other; and thus have inadvertently exposed the representative of the human race to a combat, to which he was created so unequal? According to this scheme, the very Prescience of God is an impeachment of his wisdom, since he must thus have concerted a plan which he knew would prove abortive.

If we attend to the plan itself, it will, in every respect, appear unworthy of Deity. In other cases, where we trace the divine footsteps, we discover marks of wisdom; we judge them to be of God from the stamp of excellency impressed upon them; but who can possibly discern the wisdom of a constitution, which not only failed in the primitive design, but inevitably exposed the vast majority of mankind to endless woe? What marks of design worthy of God do we trace, in resting the character and felicity of numberless beings on the single act of a frail individual; in rendering them nominally good or bad, really happy or wretched, by imputation and proxy? If it be an essential character of wisdom to discern and adapt means to ends, that some valuable purpose may be obtained, it surely cannot be found in a doctrine, that represents the means to be inadequate, and

the issue the reverse of what was intended, that is, the reverse of every thing wise and good.

If it be one property of Justice not to inflict punishment beyond desert, can the utmost stretch of imagination conceive of an act of injustice equal to the conduct imputed to the Supreme, which has exposed "numbers, beyond enumeration," to eternal misery for a single act of their primogenitor, while they were sleeping in unconsciousness? Can any act be more unjust, than the judicial punishment of the innocent for imputed crimes, than to rank those who have never transgressed, in the class of the vilest offenders, for a conduct over which they could have no influence; and to exclude them from the pardon you allow to have been granted to the real offender? Had Æsop lived in the christian era, and been informed, that such a tenet was maintained by some professors of christianity, we should have suspected that the fable of the wolf and the lamb, which every ingenuous schoolboy reads with indignation, had been invented to satirize and confute so extravagant an idea.

You say, that this multitude, doomed to eternal perdition, fall a sacrifice to the vindictive justice of God, whose laws have been violated by the grand representative of the human race. But can Deity be unjust and cruel to others, that he may be just to himself? The satisfaction of the attribute justice, is, in reality, a simple abstract idea. Justice suffers no misery, if it be not satisfied; and it cannot demand

the misery of millions, who never intentionally offended it. Besides, since the claims of vindictive justice have been waived in the salvation of the elect, what can have rendered them so inexorable respecting the reprobated? or, why should its claims be paramount to those of every other attribute? Are they more sacred than those of *Benignity* and *Compassion*? Must this so peremptorily demand millions of victims, and are the others to be easily satisfied with a few scattered monuments of mercy?

But the principal defence of your fundamental doctrine is founded upon a supposed covenant, which it is said God entered into with Adam; according to which it was stipulated, that he and his posterity should enjoy eternal life, in consequence of his obedience. It is therefore pleaded, that as Adam submitted to the terms, the Deity is fully justified in executing the sentence denounced against disobedience.

The first answer to this assertion is, that it is a mere assertion, and no revelation. Among the numerous covenants really mentioned in the Old or New Testament, it is nowhere to be found. Those upon record are obviously just, most of them replete with benignity and love. They are all worthy of a God, worthy of being adored. Not one of them has the most distant reference to the fall of Adam; and we shall search in vain for a stipulation so formed, that a breach of its conditions on the part of man should involve myriads of innocent beings in endless misery.

The idea of a covenant is solely entertained as a subterfuge, under which distressed argument may shelter itself; but it is totally inadequate to the purpose. A moment's reflection will convince you, that it was unworthy of the Deity, and ill adapted to the state of man. If you suppose, that supreme Intelligence did not foresee the issue of this compact, which is the most favourable supposition we can make, you must admit, that it was a desperate venture to place the eternal interests of the whole human race upon such a hazard. We are struck with horror when we read, that the ancient Germans used frequently to stake the liberty of their wives and children upon the throw of a die, and yet we must imagine that the Supreme Parent staked the felicity of his intellectual offspring upon an event, that was equally precarious. If you acknowledge that he *foreknew* the event, the imputation is infinitely stronger. In that case, this extolled covenant, which is to settle every difficulty, by fully vindicating the divine justice, bears all the marks of an illicit contract. Adam, confiding in the powers newly received from his Maker, and deeming them fully adequate to every trial to which the benignant Author of his existence would expose him, must have accepted the terms in the simplicity and ingenuousness of his heart. But his Creator *foreknew* the dreadful consequences; and what shall we term this, if it be not deceitfully taking in the unwary? If it be not holding out a ticket to the grasp, which,

upon the face of it, promised riches immense, while the proposer knew it would be drawn a dreadful blank? Or what shall we think of that commiseration, which should propose a compact, Omniscience foresaw would be so fatal in its result; which should expose the dearest interests of the universe to the vibrations of Adam's free will, with a previous knowledge that it would finally point at destruction?

You may, perhaps, object that such language is bold even to rashness; you will plead, that notwithstanding we agree in our ideas of justice and goodness in the abstract, we may frequently err in our application of these terms to particular instances; and because we are prone to make egregious mistakes in dispositions and conduct, often deeming that to be just and good, or to be unjust or cruel, which in fact is the very reverse. This objection is admitted to have some force, but when duly considered it will be discovered to add strength to our argument, and justify every expression that has been uttered.

You cannot maintain, that because we sometimes err in our ideas of moral conduct, we must *always* err; for this mode of reasoning, would render every thing uncertain, and bring us back to a state of confusion and ignorance. Were this to be established as an universal axiom without any exception, it would destroy itself. The same evidence, which, in certain instances, detects that we had misapplied those terms, manifests that we do not misapply them always; oth-

otherwise we should never be able to correct our opinion effectually, nor would the mind find itself authorized to settle in the full conviction of a truth. Let us then attend to the manner in which our former errors have been corrected, and we shall discover a rule of conduct sufficient to direct us in every similar instance. In all cases, we correct our judgment, by rendering ourselves more perfect masters of the subject under consideration; that is, by obtaining minute and accurate information concerning every circumstance that can elucidate it; and by giving to each circumstance, without reserve, its genuine character and due degree of importance. Every person of sound intellect is able to judge of right and wrong in conduct, when each material article, relative to the act, is fairly placed before him, provided his mind be totally free from the bias of prejudice. We thus, in some cases, acquire a power of discrimination which we deem infallible. It is thus we are able to exculpate or convict in courts of judicature; and venture to decide concerning guilt and innocence, where the life and character of the arraigned, that is, all that is valuable to him, is at stake; and where the character and mental peace of the juror himself, depend upon the truth of his verdict. It is by attending to every leading circumstance of a fact, we know that to take what has been the property of another, is not always theft; to destroy life is not always to commit murder; that every act of severity is not always an

injustice ; and every indulgence granted may not always be a real kindness.

Thus the conduct of Deity towards his rational creatures may, in many instances, appear extremely severe, perhaps inconsistent with justice. But as we are not fully acquainted with the deserts of the individual, on the one hand, nor with the whole plan of Providence concerning him on the other, we should be rash and precipitate in the extreme, did we form our judgment according to these appearances. Did we know the whole, the equity and benignity of a being, essentially just and good, must necessarily be rendered conspicuous ; and the coincidence between character and conduct would be fully demonstrated. As long as the possibility of retribution remains, the severest conduct may finally indicate itself to be the truest benignity directed by wisdom ; and the full indemnification, which Omnipotence is able to bestow, may render those trials a subject of joy and gratitude, which, in the painful process, excited the contrary emotions. When, therefore, we have arrived at the ultimatum concerning a plan, or an action ; when we are able to estimate the degree of influence belonging to every circumstance surrounding it, we are then able to decide concerning its nature and character. We may then pronounce a verdict without hesitation ; no further appeal can be made, nor can any circumstances present themselves to produce a change of opinion.

Now this is precisely the case with the subject in debate. Your doctrine professes to give a history of the whole plan of Providence respecting the human race ; and to the conduct of Providence towards this race are our ideas necessarily confined. Every essential part is stated ; the primitive designs of creation ; the seduction of Satan ; the guilt of Adam ; the inculcation of his unconscious progeny ; the punishment denounced ; the motives for its extreme severity—to avenge vindictive justice ; the exceptions which annihilate its necessity—the salvation of a chosen few in the same predicament, without the shadow of a motive. A clearer case has never been stated before a court of judicature ; and we may add, never could the decision of NOT GUILTY be pronounced with a firmer tone, than we are able to pronounce the innocence of Adam's progeny. Never could a court be more assured that particular conduct is unjust, cruel, unworthy of its agent, than we may rest assured, that a just and merciful Being cannot sentence the unconscious children of Adam to eternal misery, on account of this single act of disobedience.

From inattention to the essential difference, which particular circumstances necessarily make in the nature and character of any action, it proceeds, that you, and the supporters of your system, are so prone to adduce as powerful arguments, every instance of divine conduct, which bears but the slightest analogy to the subject in question ; although this mode of reason-

ing leads to consequences, which yourselves must reject. It was this which induced you to conclude, that because the Supreme Being has admitted some evil into the system of things, he is free to multiply and diffuse it in the most arbitrary manner, and to the greatest extent; which, if true, would, as has been already hinted, approximate the most opposite characters, and render the state of mankind as lamentable under the government of the best of beings, as under the tyranny of the worst.

The declaration made to the Jewish people by the Almighty, that "he visiteth the iniquity of the father upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him," furnishes us with another example of the same inconclusive mode of reasoning. An argument has been drawn from it, that as it is consistent with the justice of God to visit the iniquity of parents upon their offspring in one instance, why not in all? The answer upon the principles stated above is obvious. When circumstances, which have an apparent similarity, indicate themselves, upon close examination, to be essentially different, no argument from so slight and imperfect an analogy can be admitted. This threat may prove itself to be within the sphere not only of justice, but of benignity. The good enjoyed may yet surpass the evils suffered; and undoubtedly will surpass the deserts of the offending sufferer. The threat was intended to prevent the offence; while it shuts no door to the repentance,

which severity is calculated and designed to promote ; and which will be succeeded by the return of the divine favour and protection. What relation has such an admonition with that final state of things, where punishment infinitely exceeds personal demerit, repentance can be of no avail, and “ hope never comes that comes to all ? ” We must also observe, that, according to the manifest constitution of human affairs, a regular series of cause and effect is established in every station and relation in life ; and the nature and complexion of the one will be according to the tendency of the other. Parents are not only the source of the existence, but of the lot of their offspring. Both the prosperity and distress of children, in cases innumerable, depend upon the success or adversity, the prudence or imprudence, the virtuous or vicious conduct of the authors of their being. It was therefore a benignant admonition, which warned the Israelites, that the effects of a rebellious conduct would extend their pernicious influence beyond the existent generation ; that by transmitting an idolatrous spirit to their posterity, they necessarily transmit the punishments annexed to idolatry. In the same declaration they are informed, that mercy would be shown to thousands of those who loved him and kept his commandments. In this very passage, therefore, the divine benignity shines conspicuous, both in the threat and in the promise ; and the disposition to show mercy is represented as greatly exceeding that to chastise ;

perfectly harmonizing with the many other assurances, that he is slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy; that he will not always chide, nor retain his anger forever. Assurances as opposite to the system we are combating, as the meridian day to the gloom of midnight; as the joys of heaven to the pangs of hell. If that system be true, the punishment is inflicted upon souls, that could not be admonished by the threat; the visitation is an eternity of pure, unalloyed misery; the Deity is quick to revenge, infinitely slow to pardon; he doth chide where there is no fault; and his anger endureth forever without any just provocation.

If arguments from slight analogies formed upon admitted facts thus prove inconclusive, those deduced from vague conjecture ought to prove more unsatisfactory. In your attempt to convince the skeptic of the truth of the christian religion, which, according to your creed, necessarily comprehends the belief of this doctrine; you demand of him, whether "all this weight of evidence is to be overbalanced by this one difficulty on a subject so confessedly high and mysterious; considering, too, that he must allow we see but a part—oh, how small a part of the universal creation of God, and that our faculties are incompetent to judge of the scheme of his infinite wisdom." Not to observe that the whole mystery on the subject is, that any man of sense can admit such a doctrine without evidence, and that every difficulty is at once removed by rejecting it; not to repeat what has

already been advanced to prove the futility of your reasoning, concerning the incompetency of the human faculties to judge of religious tenets ; it is very apparent from the above passage, that you feel yourself necessitated to plunge into the immensity of creation in search of an argument to justify your hypothesis. We shall follow you for a moment, attempt to give shape and consistency to vague ideas, couched under general expressions, and show that your system can derive no consolation or support from this quarter. Your observation can only be relevant to the subject by its suggesting, that the plan of Providence towards our first parents and their offspring may be intimately connected with, and exert an important influence over, some other part of the universal system. But we can conceive of no other influence than the force of example ; and the only object of this example must be to deter other probationary beings from the imitation of a similar conduct. If this, Sir, be your meaning, the objections against it are as formidable as any that have been urged against the doctrine which gave it existence. How large do you imagine the number of these parental representatives of future offsprings, who require such an expense of happiness in order to keep them in awe ? What ideas shall we form of their primitive character, if methods like these are requisite to retain them in their allegiance ? Must they not be too depraved to merit such sacrifices ? Or dare we for a moment entertain the horrid idea,

that the divine wisdom and goodness could discover no better methods in order to teach lessons of obedience to surrounding worlds? Can cruelty and injustice become the basis of the moral government of the most perfect of beings? Will he create a mass of misery among one race of his creatures, that another may escape it? It is most true, Sir, that we cannot fathom the depths of infinite wisdom. "The ways of the most perfect Being are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." They are infinitely *better*, not infinitely *worse*. They are "high as the heavens, above our thoughts and our ways," not deeper than the abyss below them. If this condemnation of the human race for the sin of Adam be itself cruel and unjust, as you acknowledge yourself sometimes tempted to suspect, the utmost extent of its uses cannot alter its nature. We are forbidden to do evil that good may come; and infinite perfection will never set us the example. Tyranny itself, in its most wanton exertions, has never devised or executed a plan so extravagant; has never attempted to retain one class of subjects in obedience, by gibbeting the innocent offspring of another.

These remarks may possibly convince you, that your *embryo* argument again proceeds from a very defective analogy. You now suppose that, because exemplary punishment may be useful among one class of frail and imperfect creatures, it becomes absolutely requisite to prevent the frailties and imperfec-

tions of another ; because the guilty are made to suffer for the good of the community they have injured, the innocent offspring of the guilty may be exposed to sufferings unparalleled, for the good of a state with which they have no other connexion ; because pains and imprisonments form too large a portion of our defective governments, they are absolutely necessary, under the perfect administration of a most perfect Being, to retain one part of the universal system in obedience ; and that he has created a race or races of beings, whose powers and dispositions have been exactly adapted to such disingenuous motives.

Thus, my good Sir, do we find, upon taking, not a partial and superficial, but a full and comprehensive survey of this doctrine, as stated by its warmest advocates, that it is surrounded by the most formidable objections ; objections which cannot be confuted nor evaded. Your system, professing to lay the whole plan of Providence before us, enables us to judge of its nature and complexion ; and we may safely pronounce that it is unworthy of the perfections of Deity. The divine attributes are so implicated in this transaction, that one cannot possibly escape without the impeachment of some other. There must have been a deficiency in foresight, in wisdom, in power, in justice, or in goodness, or the event, as represented in your system, could not have happened. If Satan deceived the All-wise, then was he still wiser ; if he succeeded in opposition to the exertions of the Almighty

to prevent the evil, then was he more powerful ; if the event took place with his concurrence or connivance, then was it a conspiracy with the evil one, contrary to all the principles of justice, goodness, and commiseration ; and he, whose nature and character it is to hate sin and misery, formed a league with Satan to render them perpetual ! Surely, Sir, these inductions, flowing so necessarily from your system, ought to make you tremble. Look at it again, and say, can a doctrine, which contains such an accumulation of absurdities and impieties, be deemed honourable to our Creator ? Ought it to be considered as the basis of true Christianity ?

If you still remain unconvinced of your error, respecting the doctrine itself, you will, it is hoped, conclude from the above train of reasoning, that when the nominal christian renounces a doctrine you think so essential, he may also be actuated by a concern for the honour of God ; that it is not a desire to extol human nature in a manner flattering to human pride, which prompts him to deny this original depravity, with its consequent punishment ; nor a wish to show himself wise above what is written, which induces him to reject the supposed covenant as apocryphal, and contemplate its conditions with horror. He argues not for himself, but the character of his God, and your God, is intimately concerned in the debate ; that Being whom we are commanded both to love and to imitate. Since it is enjoined upon us, that we

“be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect,” how important is it that we entertain the most worthy ideas of the divine character and conduct, in order that obedience to his commands may be in unison with the imitation of his example. But if your system be true, the imitation of the divine model would naturally lead us to be incautious, or unjust, or cruel ; implacable in our resentments, and partial in our forgiveness. We also should feel ourselves entitled to revenge every injury, under the pretext of satisfying vindictive justice ; for if justice in the abstract necessarily requires the punishment of the offender, neither can we pardon without committing an offence against it, by being unjust to ourselves.

We are commanded to “love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our might ;” but this devout and ardent affection can only be founded upon a conviction of his superlative goodness. Every sentiment, that has a tendency to check this conviction, must inevitably damp the ardour of our affection. Every sentiment, that largely displays the divine benignity, is calculated to fan the devout flame. In the doctrine of original sin and its ordained consequences, most certain it is, that the universal benevolence of the Deity is not rendered conspicuous ; much less is it represented in a manner adapted to warm the generous heart. The only love that can be excited, consistent with its principles, is the personal gratitude of the elect, for what they justly term astonishing and unmerited favour. Out of this small

circle the Universal Parent must become an object of terror. The duty must therefore be confined to them; for the non-elect, experiencing no essential benignity, cannot possibly perform it. They must be as destitute of motives, as you deem them destitute of natural powers. There is a selfishness also in the affection of the elect, which diminishes the lustre of so excellent a disposition; for a due regard to that other command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," would disqualify a benevolent mind for the enjoyment of this exclusive felicity. It would lament the misery of the damned too deeply to feel satisfaction at the distinguished favour conferred upon itself; unless, indeed, you admit another extravagance, and suppose that it will be the office of the same spirit, which softens the christian's heart in this world, to harden it in a more exalted state.

How different this contracted, monopolizing temper, and the scheme which inspires it, from that inspired by a conviction of the universal benignity of Deity, entitling us to call upon the whole earth "to rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth;" from being fully assured that "his throne is established in righteousness, and that his mercy endureth forever." Sentiments like these must impress the *wicked* in the hour of reflection; and they communicate joy unalloyed to the benevolent christian, as often as his mind yields itself up to their full impression.

LETTER VI.

The Scheme of Original Depravity not necessary to account for Moral Imperfection in Man. Arguments against the Doctrine drawn from its pernicious Consequences.

SIR,

A person unacquainted with artificial theology, and ignorant of the extravagances of which it is capable, would be much surprised when informed, that a scheme like the one we have been contemplating, was invented expressly to *vindicate* the character of Deity. He would naturally inquire, what imputation can be supposed *worse* than the one this vindication necessarily brings with it? He will urge that the apology is totally on the side of *Man*, and not of his *Maker*; since the depravity, which is hereditary and inevitable, renders what is termed vice as instinctive, and consequently as innocent as the brutal propensities of the most brutal animals; and he will ask, can any thing stronger be suggested against the divine perfections, than to treat these instinctive propensities as crimes deserving eternal punishment? When you unfold your principles before him, by asserting that every thing, which comes immediately out of the hands of Deity, must be perfect; that it is inconsistent with the divine attributes to form creatures in a depraved state, and therefore they must have been rendered depraved by incidental circumstances; he will reply,

that the difference is not so immense between permitting the agency of a wicked spirit to effect this fatal change, by which his own eternal purpose was accomplished, and originally creating man with the propensities you contemplate and bewail; nor is there more injustice in punishing mankind for the primitive depravity with which they were created, than in rendering them liable to eternal damnation for imputed crimes.

But without wishing to palliate the frailties and imperfection of human nature, he will remind you, that there is a large space between absolute perfection of character, and radical depravity; and that a large diversity of mixed characters may be formed within that space; and he will again demand, what proofs have you that it is inconsistent with the divine perfections to create beings capable of this diversity? If you say that every thing which comes from God must be perfect, he will require an explanation. He will ask, Do you mean to preclude the Deity from the creation of any beings, who are not perfect in knowledge, disposition, and felicity? without which there must be occasional crimes of ignorance, of depraved wills, and some share of misery; if so, you presume to limit his creative powers to the formation of beings perfect like himself. If this position be disavowed, it will necessarily follow, that there must be some kind and degree of imperfection in the creation of God. And this being admitted, he will again ask, *How can you prove that the degree of imperfection*

and depravity observable in human nature exceeds that, which it is within the limits of the divine attributes to admit? He will further suggest the possibility, that, in the wide empire of the universe, an infinite diversity of methods may, in the plenitude of infinite wisdom, be rendered conducive to the same issue; the promotion of all possible happiness. He may suppose it to be the divine plan, in our system, to form beings, who shall be placed at a great distance from complete felicity, but with endowments that shall render felicity attainable; to create in ignorance, but to furnish with powers and means of acquiring knowledge; in weakness, both individually and collectively, but with the capacity of acquiring personal and combined strength; to implant a principle of self-love, which, though innocent in its nature, may prove inordinate and pernicious, unless it be under the control of higher principles, with which our natures are likewise endowed; to inflict sufferings, but to give them a salutary tendency, so that they may be productive of greater good than could have been promoted without them. He will admit, that such a plan may not correspond with our wishes; and that our impatience to enjoy happiness will induce us to imagine, that it is not the best possible; but you will surely allow, Sir, that it is infinitely more consonant with our ideas of a wise and perfect governour, than plunging a whole race into endless misery at once, without crimes of their own, without means of reforming their native depravity, or hopes of escape.

One singular advantage attends the above hypothesis ; it is not necessary that it should be true, in order to invalidate yours. If there be no proofs that it is contrary to Scripture, that it is irrational, or that it is peculiarly derogatory to the divine perfections, it has infinitely the advantage. It may be false, and yet confute your bold assertion, that there is no other way of explaining the phenomena of human depravity, than the one you have adopted ; it may be false, and yet afford a more pertinent and more honourable solution of the difficulty, until the discovery of a better shall produce still greater satisfaction to the impatient mind.

If the adoption of this should commit too great a violence upon prejudices and habits, that have been long formed, there is another hypothesis which approaches nearer to your own, and ought to have a decided preference ; and that is the ancient doctrine of Manes, from which yours is manifestly derived, and of which it may be justly deemed a *corruption*. The Manichean system completely exculpates the Deity from being the author of evil, and the intentional cause of misery. The Creator is deprived by it of no other attribute than that of infinite power, which is no impeachment of his moral character. Since his designs and plans may yet be just, wise, and good, the grand respectability of character still remains, and the incessant exertions of his power, to the destruction of misery, which he did not voluntarily permit, still demand the universal tribute of

love and gratitude. Their doctrine further administers this consolation ; it admits that the good Being will finally become triumphant over the malignant Spirit ; and that order, virtue, and happiness, shall, at some future period, be diffused through the universe. Who, Sir, that has it in his choice, would not prefer reposing his mind upon an error, which promises such a desirable issue, rather than suffer it to be tossed, like the fallen angels of Milton, upon the waves and surges of eternal misery, to which your system incessantly directs our thoughts ?

Many other objections might be advanced against an hypothesis, which you deem so essential to christianity ; but if the force of these already urged be not sufficient to subdue your prejudices, it would be in vain to expect success from the most numerous auxiliaries. We might examine the principles upon which you rest the *importance* of this doctrine, and prove them fallacious. We might assert, that to strike terror into the human mind, by expatiating upon the danger of actual transgressions, is much better calculated to produce a change in minds and morals, than the method which your system pursues. For true repentance can only arise from a consciousness of personal guilt ; and a rational expectation of the terrible judgments of God, can alone be founded on a conviction that they are *righteous*, and we *deserve* them. It would not be difficult to demonstrate, that a firm and influential belief of your hypothesis would extend the most baneful effects over the whole human

race, in every successive generation. It would bring forward such a total debasement of character, as to create mutual detestation, and excite universal suspicion. It would compel every individual, when accused of the vilest dispositions, and basest principles, to admit the charge. It would diffuse an universal gloom, which nothing *could*, nothing *ought* to dissipate. The benevolent mind would perpetually suffer the torments of the damned, by reflecting upon the miseries that probably await the majority of its most intimate and endearing connexions. Every principle of humanity would forbid the most virtuous commerce of the sexes ; and celibacy, as the only means of exterminating a race born under the wrath and curse of its Creator, would be the sublimest of duties. You might also be admonished, that, if the danger of speculative errors proceeds from their pernicious tendency, an error so peculiarly dishonourable to Deity, which has a tendency to embitter every enjoyment in life, to throw one class of persons into a sinful despondency, and tempt another to reject all religion, must deservedly be placed among the most dangerous ; and nothing can prove a future excuse for your creed, but that sincerity against which you have entered so solemn a protest ; or afford such consolation to the mind, as the benignity which your creed insults.

Having thus reasoned with you to the utmost extent of the subject, we might justly extol our courtesy in condescending to argue with persons, whose hypothesis deprives them of the right. For what evi-

dence can those produce, that they are qualified to argue upon the subject, whose leading principle is, that the fall of Adam has impaired our intellects, and blinded our judgments, to such a degree, that we are not able in any one instance to think or to act right? How can they, who maintain the depravity of human reason, convince us that every thing they urge, in defence of their system, does not proceed from that very perversion of intellect, which they confess to have seized the whole human race?

Justice could not be done to these hints, without increasing our trespass upon your time and patience; and therefore they are submitted to the amplification of your leisure moments.

It is hoped, Sir, that you will perceive, from the pains which have been taken in these letters, to state the objections to the doctrine of original sin, in all their force, that the writer sincerely aims at your conviction. He would be happy to relieve you from that embarrassment of mind under which you manifestly labour. He assures you that it is a pleasant thing for faith to walk hand and hand with reason; and he sincerely thinks, that it would not only be an honour, but an advantage to rational christianity, were you to become its advocate. Eloquence, like yours, founded upon true principles, might produce the most beneficial consequences.

These Letters are addressed to you through the medium of the public, that they may, in some degree, serve as an antidote to the pernicious effects of your

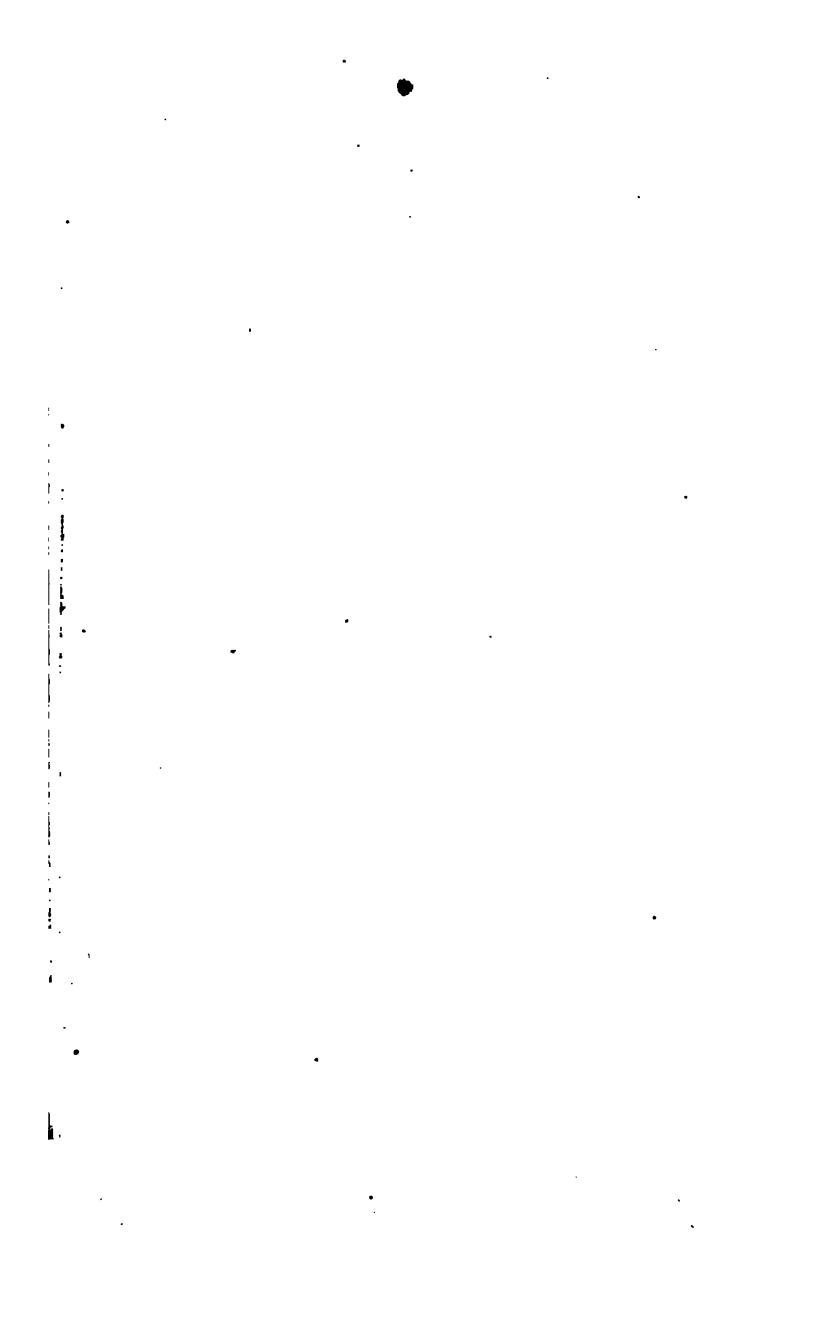
Treatise, upon minds already prejudiced against christianity,—whose prejudices must inevitably be confirmed, by the apprehension that your doctrines are essential to genuine christianity. It is also ardently desired to soften that uncharitable asperity, which your work is unhappily calculated to increase among a numerous and respectable body of christians, by indicating that your principles are not rejected without mature consideration. In order to make the experiment, whether it be not possible for reason to gain the ascendancy over the influence of station, and popularity of character, the writer has concealed his name, that his arguments may be appreciated according to their real validity ; and that their influence may not be diminished by prejudice, or receive adventitious force from predilection. If he has, in some instances, expressed himself in strong language, he has taken care that such language should be authorized by stronger arguments ; and whenever he has manifested *indignation*, he has felt that the doctrine deserves it, which was with him an additional proof of its being a pernicious error ; for nothing, which comes from God, can possibly excite *that* emotion.

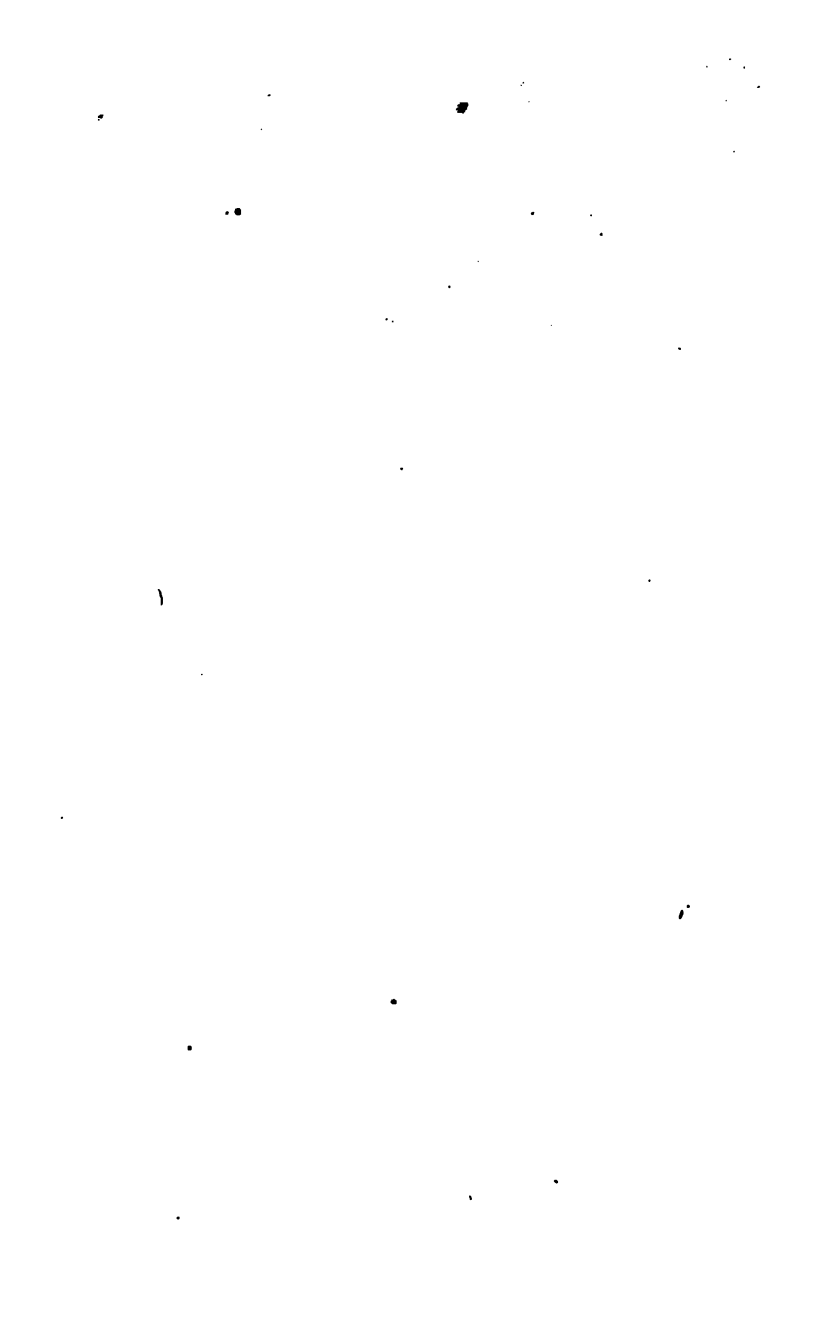
With the respect due to your distinguished merits,
I have the honour to subscribe myself,

Sir, your fellow Christian,
and obedient servant,

A LAYMAN.







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